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Scottish Bird News

No 69 Sept. 2003

A voyage to St Kilda

The spectacular home to thousands of seabirds, an endemic subspecies of Wren, and with the chance of sharks, seals and cetaceans, few people would need much persuasion to visit St Kilda. The SOC cruise to the islands in August is described by Arthur Grosset, who was as busy with his camera as his binoculars!

No, there's not a lot to see upon St Kilda -
Two dozen empty bothies and a wall;
It's a dreary little dot of desolation,
One hundred miles due west of bugger all.

We can assume that the military gentleman who penned these words was not a member of the SOC, nor had the advantage, as we did, of visiting the islands accompanied by Stuart Murray, author of *Birds of St Kilda*, and Mary Harman, who wrote *An Isle called Hirte*, a book describing the history and culture of St Kilda.

As we boarded *Poplar Voyager* at Oban on the Friday evening we were aware that it was too late in the year to see the enormous breeding colonies of Puffin and Guillemot, but we would still be able to see the famous colonies of Fulmar and Gannet and much else besides including, we hoped, some cetaceans.

While sailing up the Sound of Mull and into the Minch the next morning, our skipper, Bob Theakston, told us that conditions were reasonably calm and the wind westerly. On this basis he suggested that, rather than overnight in the Outer Hebrides, we press on to St Kilda. Given the relatively foggy conditions as we crossed the Minch, and our enthusiasm to get to St Kilda, we readily agreed.

But even a gentle swell, if experienced for over 14 hours, can have a predictable effect, so it was a reduced band of birders who saw the magnificent sunset as we approached the archipelago. Bob suggested that the best way to ensure a decent night's sleep was to have a short walk on dry land. Taking his advice, most of us had our first encounter with the island of Hirta, the principal island of the St Kilda group. Fortunately, Ian Andrews stayed aboard and was able to rescue a bird that flew against one of the boat's windows, probably attracted by the lights. When the rest of us returned, therefore, we had superb in-hand views of a Leach's Storm-petrel before it was released. (St Kilda holds an estimated 92% of the British and Irish population of Leach's, in the largest colony in the north-east Atlantic).

Lying 55km north-west of North Uist, the St Kilda archipelago comprises four islands and a few precipitous stacs. The main island, Hirta, is 638ha and rises to 430m. This view shows (l to r) Stac an Armin (where the last British Great Auk was killed in 1840), Stac Lee and Boreray. (Arthur Grosset)

Sunday was a day for exploring Hirta, so we set off after a few words of welcome from the National Trust for Scotland warden. One of the first birds seen was the St Kilda Wren. Although there are 79 species of wren in the world, only one is found outside the New World. This is *Troglodytes troglodytes* of which the St Kilda Wren *T t hirtensis* is one of several island subspecies (others are found on Fair Isle, the Outer Hebrides, Shetland, Faeroes and Iceland). There are over 200 pairs of St Kilda Wren and it is larger, longer-legged, less rufous and more heavily barred than mainland birds (see *Scot Birds* 24: 18-35).

A trek to Cambir on the far side of the island allowed some of us to look onto the island of Soay. This was the home of the Soay sheep, a primitive native breed that appears to have lived on St Kilda since Neolithic times. When the St Kildans left in 1930 they took their domestic sheep with them and some Soay sheep were introduced onto Hirta, where there are now around 1,200 of them.

As we crossed the moorland, we were occasionally dive-bombed by Bonxies. This skua started to breed on St Kilda as recently as 1963 and there are now about 200 pairs. We saw some dark juveniles, and a fledgling sitting in the shallow depression of its nest. Photos were rapidly taken before the adults returned! The Bonxies would shortly be leaving for the winter, migrating out to sea, in some cases as far south as Brazil.

On Monday the weather was good and the sea relatively calm, so Bob suggested a cruise round the islands. The main objective was Boreray, the third big island in the group, with the impressive Stac Lee and Stac an Armin alongside. Boreray is the home of the world's largest Gannet colony, supporting 19% of the global

One of the islands' 130,000 or so Fulmars. (Arthur Grosset)

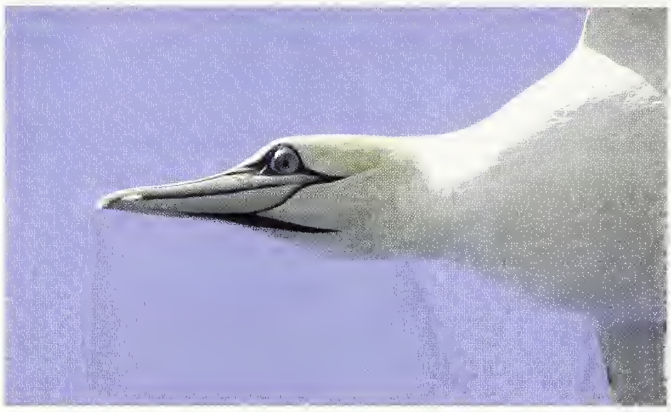
SHOUT
SHARE
IT

The SOC group ashore at Neist Point, Skye: (l to r) Stuart Murray, Elizabeth Wace, Ian Andrews, Paul Speak, John and Wendy Mattingley, Jill Harden and Mary Harman. (Arthur Grosset).

population. It is also the oldest known colony, with breeding there recorded prior to the ninth century. In 1994, over 60,000 occupied sites were counted. It was a staggering sight as we sailed around the island and close to the stacs. A few Bonxies were patrolling the approaches and we witnessed several skirmishes as they harassed returning Gannets.

After dinner on board, a few of us headed off to the world-famous Puff Inn, one of the remotest pubs on the planet! It was surprisingly busy, with not only members of the military base, a Soay sheep-monitoring team, and ourselves, but also a group of thirsty individuals who had arrived that afternoon from the Old Forge Pub at Knoydart on what was later headlined in *The Scotsman* as "Intrepid drinkers sail hundreds of miles on unique pub crawl"!

We had another cruise round the islands on Tuesday, this time sailing along the south-western edge of Hirta and including another island, Dun, which has very large colonies of Leach's Storm-petrel (an estimated 16-17,000 breeding pairs) and Puffins (over 55,000 apparently occupied burrows). Unfortunately, Leach's are not seen during the day and the Puffins had already left, although one or two were observed at sea close to shore.



A Gannet glides by. (Arthur Grosset)

Hirta is the main island for Fulmar, a species which has been there for at least the last 800 years. Indeed, it was the only British breeding site until 1878 when it colonised Foula. In 1999, almost 67,000 apparently occupied nest sites were recorded on St Kilda.

We sailed through the small gap between Hirta and Soay and, emerging along the north coast of Hirta, noticed a large group of Grey Seals dashing about in a strange way. Shortly after, we saw two, if not three, Minke Whales, and we spent some time watching these magnificent creatures swimming around us (as did the Grey Seals, who seemed to think that this was all great fun!).

On our last morning at St Kilda, Stuart took us for a cultural tour of Hirta. The history of the place is fascinating, and for us it is particularly apposite that the islands could only support such a relatively large population (up to 200 souls) because they exploited the rich local bird resources, mainly Gannet, Fulmar and Puffin. The excellent museum gives a very good feel for what it was like for these hardy and unique islanders to live on St Kilda.

After lunch we sailed due west and through the Sound of Harris to drop anchor off Skye at Neist Point. Birds seen on the journey included Manx Shearwater, Storm-petrel and Pomarine Skua. Stretching our legs before dinner with a walk to the lighthouse, we were rewarded with a distant sighting of a White-tailed Eagle.

Thursday, our last full day, saw us sailing south to Canna and round the lighthouse on Oigh-sgeir. Here we came across an impressive group of more than a dozen Basking Sharks. A Minke Whale joined them and we spent a good time watching these superb creatures as Gannets dived into the sea around them.

Our final night was spent in the Sound of Mull and, after a hearty breakfast, the next morning we tied up at Oban's North Pier. What a great trip, and what a great group of folk to be with. I'm sure that most of us will find a way of returning to these magical islands some day!

There's an awful lot to see upon
St Kilda,
Fulmars, Gannets, Bonxies,
Puffins are not all;
It's a fascinating dot of desolation,
One hundred miles due west of
bugger all.

Arthur Grosset

Trips to North Rona and the Shiants have been arranged for May 2004. Details will appear in the next SBN *and are on the Club website.*

The unique St Kilda Wren. (Arthur Grosset)

Stac Lee (172m) off Boreray. (Arthur Grosset)

Scottish Bird News
No 69 September 2003

Edited by
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Assisted by
Liz Fraser
Caroline Scott
Bill Gardner

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 31st October 2003 to:

SBN Editor, SOC,
Harbour Point,
Newhailes Road,
Musselburgh EH21 6SJ

Articles and photographs can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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"Red Grouse, Mackilston 1974" from A Bird Artist in Scotland *by Donald Watson, the Club's Honorary President. See the feature article (p 6) celebrating Donald's unique contribution to bird art and ornithology and, not least, his 85th birthday!*

NEWS & NOTICES

New Editors for *SBN*

SBN will now be edited by a team comprising Brian Cartwright (Laurencekirk), Martin Collinson (Aberdeen) and Jimmy Maxwell (Hamilton). They will be joined by Ian Francis (Aberdeen) towards the end of the year. The Club is very grateful to them for volunteering their services and hopes that they will be well supported by the membership. This new team approach will not only spread the work load, but lead to a broader and more dynamic magazine involving a greater proportion of Club members and more accurately reflecting their diversity of birding interests.

I have enjoyed my time as editor, a task made easier by the help of Caroline, Bill and Jill at HQ, president Ian and vice-president Mark, and hon librarians John and Keith. I thank all those who have written for the magazine, particularly the ones who have done it voluntarily and without duress! (The great majority of material still has to be solicited, however, which remains a cause for concern). Angus Murray of BirdLine Scotland has provided a consistently lively and interesting "Recent Reports" and made the back pages of *SBN* those to which many readers turn first. All the pages have been greatly enhanced by photographs and artwork by a variety of people, most prominent among them being John Busby and Hugh Harrop. It has been a pleasure to work with the skilful and patient Harry Scott and Alan Simpson on the design and production side. Most of all, I thank my sub-editrix, Liz, who has put far more work into the magazine than should be expected from the editor's wife!

I am grateful for the generally positive feedback I have had regarding the way *SBN* has developed over the past year. It's your magazine, after all, so please do provide constructive criticism and comments, as well as more articles, photos and artwork. The "Notes & Comment" section will hopefully expand to provide an outlet for those observations, such as unusual occurrences, numbers or behaviour of birds, which are not quite appropriate for mainstream scientific publications or those with a geographically wider scope but are, nevertheless, of significant local interest. This section, together with the longer articles, should increase *SBN*'s value as a source of material for *BS3*.

These are challenging but exciting times for the SOC and for *SBN*. I wish the new editorial team well.

Mike Fraser

Conference 2003 - "Picturing Birds"

As you will see from your mailing, this year's Annual Conference programme is finally out! The conference will take place at the Balavil Sport Hotel in Newtonmore from the 31st October to the 1st November. Booking is on a "first come, first served" basis, so please send your forms in quickly to avoid disappointment.

I'm sure you will agree that we have an excellent line-up of speakers this year. There should be something to interest everyone here. Whether you are an art lover, an amateur bird photographer, a dabbler in the new field of digiscoping, or you simply enjoy sitting down of an evening with a cup of tea to enjoy your favourite nature programme on the television - this conference is for you.

Since early pioneers such as Audubon began putting together comprehensive illustrated guides to help us understand the birds we were seeing around us, the image has been an essential part of bird identification. Sometimes written descriptions, no matter how comprehensive and accurate, never really make up for a good quality illustration.

We probably take it for granted today, but isn't it nice (especially when in some far-flung corner of the world) to be able to glance at a bird and then glance down at a field guide and say 'Ah. That's what I'm looking at!' And all of

us, at one point or other, have tried to sketch the birds we see in order to achieve a better understanding of their appearance and behaviour. This applies to everyone, from those who can rattle off effortless and convincing drawings of most species to those mere mortals, myself included, who invariably render something that, at best, looks a bit like a squashed Puffin.

With the rapid advances in optics and digital camera technology, the art of photography has become increasingly accessible to everyone as a means of capturing images of birds. No doubt our speakers will give us valuable insight into the difficulties of getting a bird photograph just right, and some insider tips on how they achieve such great results.

Artists, photographers and cinematographers who capture images of birds give us a glimpse into the world of our "quarry" in a way that no other medium can. In the process, they also provide us with an enormous amount of pleasure.

From the earliest historical representations of birds to the very modern skills involved in digiscoping and video, this year's conference will be looking at the whole picture. So take this opportunity to meet and listen to some of the most interesting people working in bird art, photography and video today. Join us for a day or for the whole weekend and combine the trip with some quality Speyside birding! More details of this year's speakers and booking information can be found on the conference programme form mailed to you recently.

Caroline Scott

Photo competition

A reminder to all bird photographers in the run-up to the conference. The team putting together the new *Birds of Scotland* ("*BS3*") is looking for photographs to illustrate every species. Images which we receive over the next three years will automatically be entered into the annual SOC Photographic Competition for that year and winners will be announced annually at the Conference. First (£30), second (£15) and third (£10) prizes will be awarded in the three categories of 'technical', 'compositional' and 'rarity'. (See *SBN* 68: 5 for full details).

The original deadline for entries was 30th Sept, but if you can get your photographs to HQ by the week ending the 24th October, they will still be entered into the competition. Judging will take place just prior to the conference and the winners will be announced on the Friday evening. Submissions must be accompanied by an application form which can be obtained from the SOC website or by contacting Caroline at HQ.

New members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire** Brian Dean, Ann-Marie MacMaster, Gilbert Aird. **Central** Martin Garrett-Cox, Alexander Downie, Alan Gardiner. **Clyde** Scott Wilson, James Rutherford. **Grampian** Dr Robert Ralph, Gavin Rowlands. **Highland** John Spencer, Mark Finn, Gwenillian Richards, Alastair Young. **Lothian** George Gladstone, Cherry Abernethy, Mike Robinson, Mike McDowall, Anita Hogan, John Gilligan, Alastair Kerr. **Stewartry** Barry and Dianne Chopping, Leslie and Margaret Fortune. **No branch** Leonard White (Mull). **South of the Border** T H Watson (Clacton-on-sea).

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **May** - **1st** £30 Miss B J Cain; **2nd** £20 R C Welland; **3rd** £10 J Ballantyne. **June** - **1st** £30 R G Allen; **2nd** £20 Mrs Craig; **3rd** £10 Mrs A Inglis. **July** - **1st** £30 B S Turner; **2nd** £20 J S Wilson; **3rd** £10 Mr and Mrs Burn. **August** - **1st** £30 H Robb; **2nd** £20 Mrs M Gibson; **3rd** £10 D S Ormond.

There are some places to fill to complete 200 members for this "year" which started on 1st June. Please help us to maintain our target number. Any member over 18 can join for the rest of the 200 Club year by sending a cheque for £6.00, payable to "SOC 200 Club", to me at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe

News from Council

A Council meeting was held in May in Stirling. The main topics of discussion were the legal structure of the Club and the parallel Scottish Centre for Ornithology, the annual accounts and progress on the Waterston House project. Some items discussed at the March Regional Committee were brought to the meeting, including a document summarising the management of branch finances. This was later presented to Management Committee for further amendment. The next meeting of Council in late August was too close to the deadline for this issue to allow an update to be given at this time. Much of the agenda of Council meetings over the last year has been taken up with the Waterston House project, but it is expected that other policy ideas will be tabled for discussion and implementation over the winter.

Discussion Groups

Please note the autumn/winter season dates for the **Borders Discussion Group** at Lindean Mill: 20th Oct, 17th Nov, 15th Dec. Please contact Ray Murray (ray.d.murray@ukgateway.net) for more details.

The **Lothian Discussion Group** meets at NTS Newhailes (Education Room), Musselburgh, on the first Wednesday of each month, Sept to April. Dates for this session are: 1st Oct, 5th Nov, 3rd Dec, 7th Jan, 4th Feb, 3rd Mar and 7th Apr. Meetings start at 7.30 pm. A charge of £1 is made at the meeting to cover room hire. Tea and coffee and cakes are available for a very modest additional sum. All members welcome. Please contact Mark Holling for further details. (01620 894037; mark.holling@whsmithnet.co.uk)

North of England Raptor Conference

The theme of this year's conference is "Cumbrian Raptors Present and Future". This will be of great interest to Scottish raptorphiles as the area adjoins our "territory" (although the birds themselves are, of course, no respecters of national boundaries). Hosted by the Cumbrian Bird Club, the conference will be held at Newton Rigg College, Penrith on Sat 22nd Nov, 2003. The cost is £12.50, and registration is from 09h00. There are only a few places left, so if you are keen to attend, please book immediately with Peter Barron, 7 Middlehowe, Rosthwaite, Borrowdale, Keswick CA12 5KD.

Seabird Group Conference

The Sixth International Conference of the Seabird Group will take place at the University of Aberdeen on 2nd - 4th April, 2004. The theme of the conference is "North Atlantic Seabird Populations". The conference aims to bring together seabird enthusiasts from a wide range of countries in a convivial and affordable setting. A highlight will be the presentation of the results from SEABIRD 2000 (the third census of British and Irish seabirds). If you are interested in attending or would like further information, please contact Alan Leitch (Alan.Leitch@snh.gov.uk). Offers of oral papers or posters should be sent to Mike Harris (mph@ceh.ac.uk) as soon as possible.

Pera March, Algarve

Many SOC members have visited the Portuguese Algarve and spent time at the Lagoa de Salgados near Pera. Within the last few years, news that the marsh and its rich bird life were under threat prompted some of us to write to the relevant local authorities and government departments, and we encouraged others in the SOC to do likewise. On a visit in March this year I found that a viewing platform was being constructed and a number of excellent descriptive notices erected, so it now looks as if this Portuguese gem may be saved. Though probably small, the input from Club members hopefully helped to impress the authorities and encouraged them to realise the value of the area for conservation and as a visitor attraction.

Keith Macgregor

Subscriptions

The date for renewing subscriptions was 1st September, not 22nd August as stated in *SBN* 68: 4. Please bear this in mind for next year, and our apologies for the confusion!

Photos in *SBN*

The credits for the photos on p 5 of *SBN* 68 were omitted. Apologies to the photographers: Dennis Johnson (Siskin [pictured below] and Red Grouse), and Hugh Harrop (Rustic Bunting). Our thanks to them and other photographers for allowing the Club to use their work. We are always on the lookout for good images for *SBN* and would welcome submissions of digital photos or scanned material on disc, or of original artwork which would be returned after scanning. Please send material to the editor at HQ.

An artist's impression of the new HQ.
(Alan Pendreigh)

Waterston House - Project Update

Development of the new SOC HQ at Aberlady in East Lothian has continued at a steady pace throughout the summer, as Bill Gardner reports.

STOP PRESS .... LATEST NEWS!!
Planning for the building was granted on 2nd October 2003 by East Lothian Council.

Design

We have now completed all the construction drawings needed for the Planning Application and Building Warrant. These drawings are also needed so that the quantities and costs of construction materials can be computed. This stage is essential, as it is against this information that potential contractors will submit their bids, hopefully sometime in October. Prior to this we will get a detailed cost estimate from our Quantity Surveyors, giving us a chance to modify the building design to make economies, should we have to. In addition, all the basic landscaping components (entrance, parking, courtyard, walling, seating, paving, decking, pond, small cascade, marsh, shingle bank and, hopefully, a Sand Martin wall), have been identified and the design concepts agreed. Future work will establish a tree and planting scheme.

All of the existing office furniture, storage-racking and much of the equipment we use at Harbour Point will be used in the new building, saving us money when the time comes to move in, hopefully in autumn or winter 2004. The building will have an internal floor area of about 330 sq m and be constructed around a massive Douglas Fir timber frame, pegged with oak pegs in the traditional manner. This frame is large enough and strong enough to allow us to expand into the roof space, if we need to, in future.

Externally, the building will be clad in larch, with oak lintels and door frames. The larch cladding will be untreated, with a design lifetime of 60 to 100 years. It will gradually weather to a light silver colour and is largely protected by the deep roof overhangs. Some of the walls will be made from recycled slate/stone from an old quarry near Aberfoyle. (You can see an example of its use at Balmaha in the newly built Oak Tree Inn). Our roof will feature large overhanging eaves, similar to the David Marshall Lodge (also in the Trossachs). This will allow people to be outside, but under cover to sit and chat and enjoy the birds in our wildlife garden whatever the weather.

Details of the internal wall/ceiling/floor finishes, lighting, room furniture and library shelving specifications are being worked on as I write, and the SOC Property Working Group will help finalise the choices for these features. Simpson and Brown, our architects and the rest of the design team have delivered a design of which I believe we can all be immensely proud.

Planning

Before we can start construction, we must obtain planning permission. We also need to ensure that we are adequately funded to create and sustain the building and its operations. Our original application was submitted to East Lothian Council in early May this year. A significant chunk of my time (and most of my nervous energy!) has been consumed dealing with councillors, senior council officials, locals, objectors, and consultees/supporters. My aim was to convince as many of them as possible that our development at Aberlady is desirable. As we will be adjacent to an important Local Nature Reserve with nationally important numbers of wintering birds, our operations do have to be appropriately sized. SNH and RSPB at local and national levels have supported our proposals and have written to East Lothian Council supporting our application.

Fundraising

I am happy to report remarkable success in fundraising. From experience on previous projects, I realised that the promise of "gifts in kind" is the ideal way to kick-start construction projects. In addition, capital grant applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage and various charitable trusts have been prepared and will be submitted once the planning process has been cleared.

So far, I have received promises/pledges whose total value is in excess of £100,000. All the timber for the building, including frame, flooring, softwood, hardwood, and cladding, will be donated by Forestry Commission Scotland - a quite exceptional gift. The main timber-frame joinery will be a commercial contract with the well-known firm of Carpenter Oak & Woodland Ltd who have featured on several of the *Grand Designs* TV programmes, and in the reconstruction of various giant mediaeval war machines.

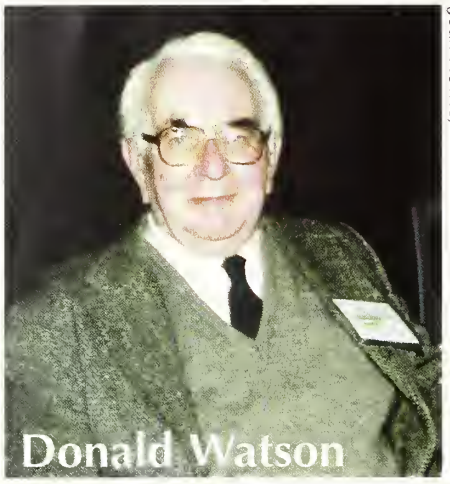
All the natural stone for facings on walls, plinth and landscaping has also been offered free of charge by Forestry Commission Scotland from their old quarry in Aberfoyle. We will need to obtain planning permission from the new National Park to allow us to extract the stone from existing spoil heaps. I have consulted the Park's Head Planner in this regard. Transport, stone-cutting and construction will be carried out as a commercial contract.

Lafarge Roofing, previously known as Redland Roofing Ltd, has offered all the roof tiles free, if we use concrete tiles, and at a 50% discount if we use clay tiles. We plan to use clay tiles because of their neat appearance and the slopes and overlaps involved. A sister company of Lafarge Roofing, Lafarge Cement (formerly Blue Circle Cement), has promised all the material we need for our concrete base. I hope to obtain other gifts in kind if possible, in addition to capital grants.

By the end of 2003 we should have received tenders from several builders. The timing of the decision by SOC Council to proceed with the project will finally depend on the realistic costs of construction and how well the fundraising is going. It will be an interesting year ahead for everyone!

Bill Gardner

BIRD ARTISTS IN SCOTLAND



(Joan Howie)

Little did I think, all those many moons ago when I use to attend the Dumfries branch "Goose Weekends" every February, that one day I would live only three doors up from Donald Watson, that quiet, modest artist, now of international acclaim, who used to lead the excursions. (In those days Donald could show us a flock of about 150 Bean Geese, a bird now gone from Galloway).

It's quite an achievement - an artist and birdwatcher for some 80 years! Born at Cranleigh in 1918, Donald's passion for birds stems from his happy, early childhood in rural Surrey. When less than five years old, his first bird drawings were copied from Thorburn pictures in the family's one and only bird book at an age when he was too young to write the bird names. The family's large garden with its orchards, and the surrounding fields and woods full of wildlife, all helped to stimulate his interest in birds. At nine years old, he copied his brother, Eric, in keeping an illustrated bird notebook. It appears that Bullfinch and Nuthatch were his favourite birds as he pictured them so often!

When Donald was 12, his Scottish father died suddenly and the family's life was completely changed. Although originally from the west of England, his determined mother decided to move with her three boys to Edinburgh. This decision was to prove of great value to ornithology in Scotland and the future SOC. Donald attended the Edinburgh Academy and was only 16 when he won the RSPB's public schools essay competition with his essay entitled "Wings and their uses" which he had illustrated with pen drawings and paintings.

Despite spending much of his time as a schoolboy drawing, painting and writing notes about birds rather than his schoolwork, in 1937 Donald won a scholarship to St John's College, Oxford, reading modern history and specialising in the Italian Renaissance. After graduating in 1940, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps before transferring to the Royal Artillery as a second lieutenant and was posted to India and Burma from

"Snow Bunting, Reed Bunting and Twite". From Birds of Moor and Mountain.

1944-46. He found, or made, many opportunities to paint the scenery and watch birds wherever he was stationed - in the Highlands, Yorkshire, Norfolk and Asia. It was in Burma that Donald resolved to try to make a living from painting on his return to civilian life.

After the war, the late Sir Arthur Duncan commissioned Donald to paint a series of large watercolours of the birds of southwest Scotland. Helped by this, Donald became what he described as a "wandering artist", and in the late 1940s and early '50s he held one-man exhibitions across the country, from Edinburgh to Bristol. In April 1949, he showed over 100 pictures in his "Scottish Birds and Landscapes" exhibition at Wheatley's Gallery in Edinburgh. This was so successful that it allowed him to continue his career as an artist.

Having started by painting for exhibitions, Donald came to illustrating relatively late in his career with his first commission, *The Oxford Book of Birds*, in 1964. Since then he has illustrated over 30 books. Donald's additional talent for writing has enabled him to produce four books of his own: *Birds of Moor and Mountain* (1972), *The Hen Harrier* (1977), *A Bird Artist in Scotland* (1988), and *One Pair of Eyes* (1994). He wrote and illustrated a section in the *Birdwatcher's Year* in 1973, the first book in the famous Poyser series, and has contributed illustrated articles to many publications including *Scottish Birds*, *Country Life*, *The Field* and *Birds*.

After marrying Joan, his life-long companion, the couple settled in Galloway and have lived in St John's Town of Dalry since 1951 where their four children grew up. Today the family is scattered, with Pam and Louise in England, Jeff in the Black Isle, and Kate in California. In 1978, Jeff was working in Seychelles and Donald and Joan joined him there for a short holiday. Several paintings were produced on those islands where the intense colours of the tropics were quite a contrast to the softer hues of Galloway.

Dotterel

Donald has painted the landscapes and wildlife of France, Spain, Majorca and California, as well as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, specialising, of course, in his beloved Galloway. Since 1947, however cold and inclement the weather, he has worked on the spot because he felt it was the only way to capture the atmosphere of real Galloway. Renowned for his many atmospheric paintings of the hills and moorland here, often with Hen Harriers in the foreground, Donald admits that a favourite subject is that bird!

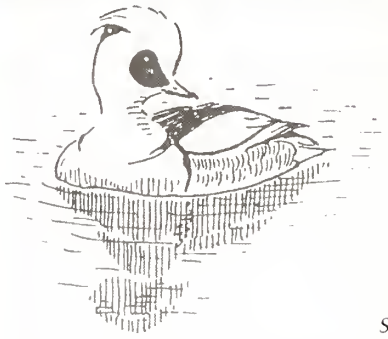
He always loves the Western Isles, finding the light and colour there to be outstanding. Many people feel that some of his finest work has been done on his visits here. His enjoyment of painting skies and water, and solving the problems of their lack of solidity, can be seen in his paintings of waders and ducks.

"Cock Merlin with chicks, Galloway, 1973". From A Bird Artist in Scotland.

"Blackcock Challenging at the Lek, 1962". From One Pair of Eyes.

Donald has a phenomenal memory for dates going back over his lifetime, as well as birds seen where and when. He has witnessed many changes in our area and feels that the extent of conifer forest as it matured was too much. His artist's eye finds the serrated tops of these trees unattractive. He regrets the loss of much of the open hill landscape which he so liked in Galloway when he first came to know the area, and the consequential loss of species such as Golden Plover.

Donald became a founder member of the SOC when the Club was formed in 1936, has served on Council, and was Vice-President for three years before becoming President from 1967-72. The Club acknowledged Donald's contribution to the study of birds in Scotland by making him an Honorary Member in 1980, followed by Honorary President in 1986. The Stewartry Branch has also made their own small tribute to this artist-naturalist who lives in their midst - they elected him their Honorary Branch Chairman in 1988. The Society of Wildlife Artists showed their appreciation of their founder member's lifelong contribution as an artist-naturalist when, in 2002, they made Donald their first Honorary Member.



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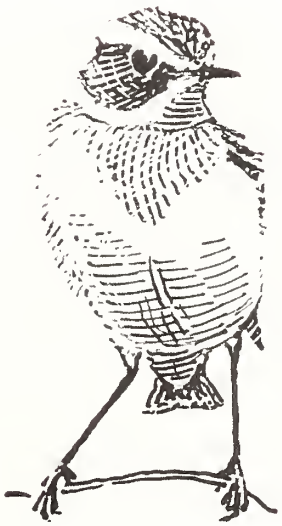


Donald is presently working on his latest book which is to be published by the Langford Press. The subject? Hen Harriers, of course! This is to be an attractively illustrated volume containing about sixty of his harrier paintings produced between the 1950s and '90s, together with pictures of other hill birds linked to the harriers. There will be explanations of when and where they were carried out, together with how they were painted and the method used. Most of the paintings were done in Scotland, mainly in Galloway, but some were painted in France and elsewhere abroad.

Pleased to be working on his new book (although he says it is quite hard work!), Donald is glad to be involved in a project he can put something into, and not be idling his time away. Watch out for this latest book by Donald Watson, hopefully in time for your Christmas present this year or for your birthday next year!

Joan Howie

The Glen Clunie Ring Ouzels

Upper Glen Clunie supports a "healthy and stable" Ring Ouzel population. (Innes Sim)

A harbinger of spring and one of our most popular upland birds, the Ring Ouzel has been declining in recent years in some areas. A team headed by Innes Sim, recipient of an SOC Research Grant, describes a study of the species in the Scottish Highlands and how further monitoring will be necessary to determine if its fall in numbers is continuing.

There has been concern for some time that the Ring Ouzel population in Britain is in decline. In *The Birds of Scotland* (1953), Baxter and Rintoul reported large decreases in parts of the country. Valerie Thom confirmed this trend in *Birds in Scotland* (1986). In 1993, *The New Atlas* showed a 27% range reduction between 1968-72 and 1988-91, mostly in Wales, south Scotland, Highland and Grampian. There was concern that this range reduction may have masked an even more serious population decline. Recent analyses suggest a 58% population decline between 1988-91 and 1999 and, as a result, the species has been 'Red Listed' (*BB* 95: 410-450). Reasons for this decline are unclear, but it may be that the regional differences are linked to variations in breeding success.

During 1998-2002, we studied Ring Ouzel breeding biology in upper Glen Clunie, Grampian. In contrast to areas such as southwest Scotland and Wales, the glen holds a healthy and stable population of the species (as reported in *Scot Birds* 22: 9-19). The valley is steep-sided, rising from 400m to peaks of up to 850m, but is easily accessible. Land use on the valley floor is mainly enclosed, semi-improved pasture for sheep with small conifer plantations, but the higher altitudes are dominated by a mosaic of Heather, grass and Blaeberry, with numerous crags, scree slopes and gullies. Red Deer, Mountain Hares, Rabbits and sheep are all present on the hill, and the land is managed for grouse and deer shooting.

Breeding birds

The number of breeding Ring Ouzels in the core study area increased from 28 pairs in 1998 to 35 in 2000, but declined to 28 in 2002 (Table 1). Hence, although there have been annual fluctuations, the population has remained stable over the five-year period. However, it will be important to continue monitoring the population in the future.

Clutch size was fairly constant over the five-year period, with clutches of four by far the most common (Table 1). Brood size at fledging was very high in 1998, decreased in 1999 and 2000, and then increased slightly in 2001 and 2002. Mean brood size at fledging was 3.6, with very few partial brood losses.

Nest-survival rates were 50-52% in 1998 and 1999, declined to 38% in 2000, then increased to 56-60% in 2001 and 2002 (Table 1). The low nest-survival rates in 2000 were probably due to Stoats as several female ouzels were found preyed upon at nests where chicks had disappeared. Other likely nest predators, such as crows and foxes, are very rare in the glen due to the activities of the two full-time gamekeepers.

The proportion of territories in which two breeding attempts were recorded varied between 52% and 68% (Table 1). These apparent variations between years possibly reflect differing food availability late in the season. Combining the above figures, the mean number of young fledged per territory was relatively high in 1998 at 3.3, fell to 2.2 in 2000, then rose to 3.5 in 2002 (Table 1). The production of young was highest in 2001 and 2002, largely due to relatively high nest-survival rates. It will be interesting to see if this results in higher breeding numbers in 2003.

Colour ringing

All chicks were fitted with a single colour ring to denote the place and year of ringing. Over the five years of the project, 804 colour-ringed chicks have fledged (Table 2). Relatively few chicks were ringed in 1999, when the number of breeding attempts per pair was unusually low. The return rate of the 1998 cohort in 1999 was relatively high at 9%. At 4.5%, the return rates of the 1999 and 2000 cohorts were only half that of the 1998 cohort, but 5.6% of the 2001 cohort returned to the glen in 2002. The overall mean return rate was 6.1%. These return rates are slightly higher than the 1.6-7.1% (mean 4.3%) found by Ian Burfield in Glen Esk and the Moorfoot Hills in 1999 and 2000.

In 2001, two chicks ringed in previous years were seen 30km to the east in Glen Esk, Tayside, site of the long-term Ring Ouzel study by David Arthur and Stewart White (*Scot Birds* 22: 50-59). A 1999 male was seen, but could not be caught to establish precisely which individual it was. A 2000 female was, however, trapped at her nest, allowing for individual identification. These two recoveries are believed to be the first

A nest brimming with chicks. The average brood size at fledging was 3.6. (Innes Sim)

Table 1. Number of breeding pairs and breeding success of Ring Ouzels in Glen Clunie, 1998-2002.

Year	Number of pairs in core study area	Mean clutch size (no.)	Mean brood size at fledging (no.)	% nests successful	Mean no. of breeding attempts per territory	Mean no. of young fledged per territory
1998	28	4.19 (21)	3.92 (37)	49.9	1.68	3.29
1999	29	3.92 (27)	3.56 (36)	52.3	1.52	2.83
2000	35	3.93 (42)	3.59 (44)	37.7	1.62	2.19
2001	26	3.97 (31)	3.65 (43)	56.4	1.66	3.42
2002	28	4.00 (39)	3.64 (45)	60.2	1.62	3.55

Table 2. Number of Ring Ouzel chicks and adults colour ringed, and their return rates in subsequent years.

Year	No. of colour-ringed chicks which fledged	No. returning in year+1 (%)	No. of colour-ringed adults	No. returning in year+1 (%)
1998	169	15 (9.0)	–	–
1999	132	6 (4.5)	20	8 (40.0)
2000	168	8 (4.5)	54	21 (38.9)
2001	171	10 (5.6)	52	24 (46.1)
2002	164	–	41	–

Over 100 adult birds were uniquely colour-ringed in the study. (Innes Sim)

confirmed movements between natal and breeding area for this species. In May 2002, a Glen Clunie chick ringed in 2001 was found dead in Glen Eye, 6km to the west. This is a glen that is known to hold good numbers of breeding Ring Ouzels. Although such dispersal movements are likely to be common, they will be under-recorded given the remote areas inhabited by the species and the paucity of breeding-season studies elsewhere in Britain.

In addition to nestlings, we individually colour-ringed 116 breeding adults between 1999 and 2002. Return rates were similar in 2000 (40.0%) and 2001 (38.9%), but rose to 46.1% in 2002. These return rates are considerably higher than the 16.7-33.3% (mean 26.8%) found in Glen Esk and the Moorfoots in 1999 and 2000. No adults ringed as breeders in Glen Clunie have been recovered outside the glen.

Predation of fledged birds

We are beginning to build up a picture of the main predators of fledged birds. An adult male was seen taken by a Peregrine, and the rings of a fledged chick were found in a Peregrine nest in 2002. Sparrowhawks have been seen catching two fledged chicks and attempting to catch an adult female. The rings from an adult female were found in a Kestrel nest. Merlins and Buzzards are also present in the glen, but we have no evidence that they have preyed on the Ring Ouzels.

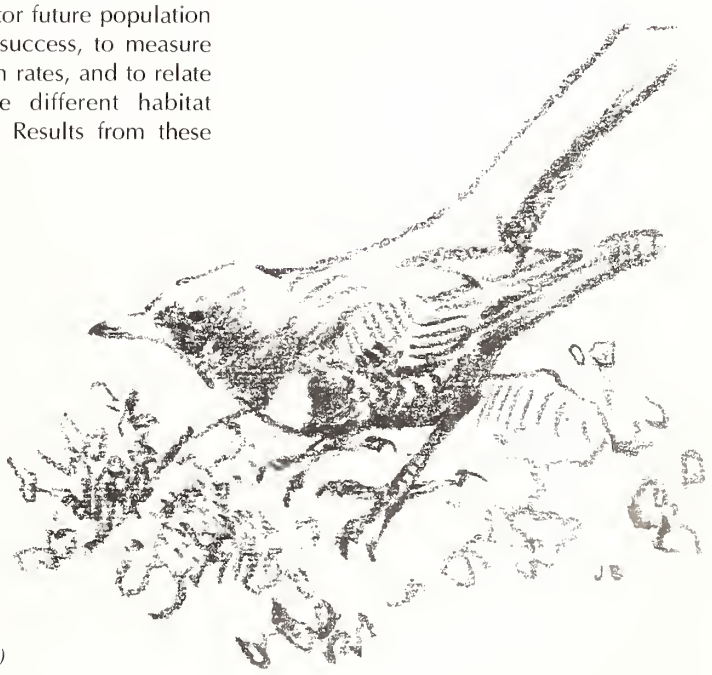
Future work

We plan to continue the study until at least 2003, and hopefully beyond. Our priorities are to monitor future population trends and breeding success, to measure chick and adult return rates, and to relate these factors to the different habitat mosaics in the glen. Results from these studies could then be used to recommend appropriate habitat management in the many areas where Ring Ouzels are declining or have disappeared.

Acknowledgements

We thank Invercauld Estate for co-operation with access to Glen Clunie. Rik Smith, Alan Leitch, Lorna Wilkie, Ian Rendall, James Pearce-Higgins and Graeme Buchanan helped with the fieldwork. The RSPB provided fieldwork time for Graham Rebecca and provided grants in 2000-2002. We thank the SOC for providing grants towards the study in 2000-2002.

Innes Sim
Graham Rebecca
Raymond & Judy Duncan



Ring Ouzel (John Busby)

Scottish birdwatching from a distance

The famous Red Grouse - one of many reasons to enjoy a birdwatching tour of Scotland. (Sam Alexander)

With winter fast approaching, one way to raise the spirits is to plan your holidays for next year. Despite the lure of foreign climes, John Parsons regularly heads north of the Border along a route that combines good birds with some of Scotland's other main attractions.

As a Somerset-born-and-bred Sassenach now living in Hampshire, I first became aware of the SOC when I was appointed to the staff of flag officer, Scotland and Northern Ireland, at Pitreavie Castle in 1973, accommodated at HMS *Cochrane*. I joined the local branch and attended indoor meetings and field trips. The outstanding meeting was a talk and film show by a police inspector who had followed terns by land and sea to west Africa. A trip to the Isle of May took the field-trip prize.

On being reappointed back to England in early 1974, I maintained my SOC membership and came back to Scotland, accompanied by my wife, during leave each summer. We stayed in hotels and B&Bs and, over the years, found that many establishments were ideal for birdwatchers on holiday, especially those who wanted to go out at dawn and come in late. These contrasted with one hotel on the north coast which would not do B&B only, and where we were told that "You must be in and cleaned up for dinner by 7 pm". This would have deprived us of three or four hours of daylight which could have been spent watching birds! At another establishment we were told that "The front door is locked at 11 pm and unlocked at 7.45 am". This would have meant no dawn chorus!

We experimented over the years and refined our resting places as we went along. We finally came up with a 10-14 day itinerary which permitted a visit to many areas of wildlife interest using accommodation run by friendly and helpful staff who knew their local areas, advised us where to look and introduced us to farmers and ghillies to increase our chances of seeing unusual birds as we went up the east coast and down the west. The following itinerary may be of interest to other members, especially from England.

Day 1 Leave home at 04h30 to be through Birmingham before the rush hour. Night spent at Bridge of Cally or Dunkeld. Aim to reach hotel by 15h00. If booked in at Bridge of Cally, call in en route at Loch of the Lowes for Ospreys. Evening trip to Lock of Kinnordy for Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Black-necked Grebe. (NB. The Dalrulzion Hotel in Bridge of Cally has a great selection of single malts).

Day 2 On to Nethy Bridge for two or three nights via Braemar, Balmoral, Cock Bridge and Tomintoul. Grouse, raptors, corvids, wildfowl and Ring Ouzels can all be seen on the way. Stop at Braemar for Dippers on the Clunie. Lunchbreak at Tomintoul and visit to 'Whisky Castle' to purchase spiritual gifts. Aim to arrive at Nethy Bridge by 15h00. Evening run to Loch Garten. Arrange for exit from the hotel early the next day.

Day 3 Porter lets us out at 04h30. Drive to Loch Garten, walk around the long trail to see Roe Deer and Red Squirrel as well as birds. Then back to the hotel for breakfast. North to Loch Ruthven for Slavonian Grebe, Black Grouse and Otters. Go east, then over the hills to Glen Findhorn. Look out for Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Red Deer and wild goats. Then down the glen to Granton and the Spey Valley.

Day 4 Repeat yesterday's morning walk on a different trail. Drive to Helmsdale looking out for Red Kite on the Black Isle, waders, gulls and divers in the firths. Check in at hotel in Helmsdale before driving north to Duncansby Head for Rock Doves, skuas, auks, gulls, Fulmars and, possibly, cetaceans. Walk to the stacks. Then drive west to Dunnet Head before going back to Helmsdale via Thurso at dusk, with owls a possibility en route.

Look out for Tysties in Lochinver harbour. (John Busby)

Day 5 Before breakfast, walk to the beach via the old church yard (for hirundines, warblers and chats). After breakfast top up with petrol (the next reliable garage is at Durness). Head up Strathkildonan to Forsinard. Visit the reserve if it's open for Greylags and Red Grouse. Back to Kinbrace, then west to Altnaharra for a lunch break plus divers and waders at the loch and Red Deer. Up to the north coast and west to Tongue. Stop at the causeway over the Kyle of Tongue for waders, terns, Shags, seaduck, seals and Otters. Then on to Durness and the hotel.

Days 6 and 7 One rest day from driving and one day for a boat and Landrover trip to Cape Wrath, depending on the weather. On the rest day, leave the hotel early, walk down to the river and follow it inland. There are divers on the lochans, and chats, pipits, Twite and Linnet in the scrub. The Cape Wrath trip will give you seabirds, auks and cetaceans.

Day 8 Drive south to Ullapool for one or two nights. Divert round the Handa loop then off to Lochinver via Drumbeg. Walk round the harbour for seals, Tysties and cetaceans. Then go on through Beinn Eighe reserve and out on the main road at Ledmore and on to Ullapool.

Day 9 Pre-breakfast walk in the hills behind Ullapool or in Beinn Eighe. Take a boat trip to the Summer Isles or Stornoway for a half or full day or have a half day round Ullapool Harbour to look for white-winged gulls in the stream mouth.

Day 10 South, stopping at Corrieshalloch Gorge then along Little Loch Broom. Visit Inverewe gardens; look out for Sea Eagles. Lunch at Kinlochleven, then either south on the main road or along the Sound of Raasay to Applecross over the pass (a strong nerve and good brakes needed here). Look out for deer, divers and grouse. Take the main road to Invergarry and Fort William, thence on to the Falls of Lora Hotel at Connel for two nights. (It has another good stock of malts!).

Days 11 and 12 Back up to Fort William on the coast road. Up Glencoe and back to Connel via the Pass of Brander (Golden Eagles and the salmon ladder). Possible boat trip in the evening to Colonsay.

Day 13 Leave Connel via the Pass of Brander and on to Inverary where the historic restored jail and polar ship are worth a visit. Then Loch Fyne and take the road for Lochgilphead, Rest and Be Thankful and on down Lomond side. After lunch, on to Moffat for final shopping, including sweets and malts. Evening trip to the Grey Mare's Tail and St Mary's Loch for Goosanders.

A stop beside a fast-flowing Highland burn should get you a Dipper. (John Busby)

Day 14 Travel home with lots of new and renewed memories! Total mileage between 2,200 and 2,600 depending on the routes taken.

John Parsons

Two Scottish specialities - Capercaillie and Black Grouse - are becoming increasingly rare and susceptible to disturbance, not least from birders. Please be considerate and careful, therefore, when looking for them. For a free copy of the RSPB's information leaflet "Black Grouse and Capercaillie Code of Conduct", contact SOC HQ, visit www.rspb.org.uk *or phone 01767 680551.*

Great Black-backed Gull may be common enough around Scottish coasts, but is still an imposing bird! (Arthur Grosset)

Aberlady in the Eighties

Continuing our history of one of Scotland's best birding sites, Pete Gordon describes some of the highlights of his time as warden of the reserve. Pete was at Aberlady in 1980-92, and is now the RSPB's conservation officer for southeast Scotland.

Like Russell Nisbet before me (*SBN* 67: 10-11), my arrival as warden at Aberlady Bay was a personal dream come true. As a botanist who had more recently taken up birdwatching, this was a unique opportunity to combine my twin loves in one of the top sites in Scotland for plants and birds.

It was not quite on my first day that a stranger came up to me and said "Hello, I'm Alan Brown. Here's my 'phone number, can you let me know if you find any good birds?" This was in the days before birdlines, the internet, mobile 'phones and pagers gave everyone instant access to bird news, so a reciprocal deal was quickly struck. It was not quite the next day, perhaps the next week, that I was able to 'phone out my first rarity – a Tawny Pipit which was frequenting the golf course near the dunes. Still a rare bird, though no longer a UK rarity, a July record is unusual, so what would the migration season bring?

Summer is the season when botanical work is to the fore, however, and it was not long before I started adding seriously to the Reserve plant list. As Aberlady is as important for its plants as its birds and has been regularly visited by many expert botanists, it might seem odd that there was anything new to be found, but each year brought additions. Some were unimportant garden escapes or weedy plants which appeared on disturbed tracks for a year or two. (Tomato plants on the tideline found another route there). Others were very similar to plants which were known to occur or were recent "splits", but one or two were more exciting finds. Parsley Water Dropwort had not been noted in the Lothians for 50 years, so it was with some care that I checked out the differences from the abundant Hemlock Water Dropwort before I got out my ticking pen. It's still there and a rewarding find if the tide's too far out to find that vagrant wader.

It was not far from this site that I made another strange observation whilst scanning wader flocks from the roadside. I watched a couple carrying a box, sit down as though for a picnic, and then scurry about in a peculiar manner. I could see through my scope what they were trying to catch - Aberlady's byelaws covered dogs but had nothing to say about exercising pet rats!

Keeping the Marl Loch clear of water-weed was a laborious task before mechanisation. (Pete Gordon)

One of the most rewarding tasks for an Aberlady warden is conducting the reserve's breeding-bird census. The importance of this work lies in detecting population trends, and in each year there would be some increases and some declines. Simply through being out regularly in the early morning, identifying everything seen or heard, the odd rare migrant was bound to be found. A singing Marsh Warbler in a thicket up the burn probably wouldn't otherwise have been discovered, although a noisy Great Reed Warbler in a Sea Buckthorn clump by the golf course might have been identified by a lucky visitor.

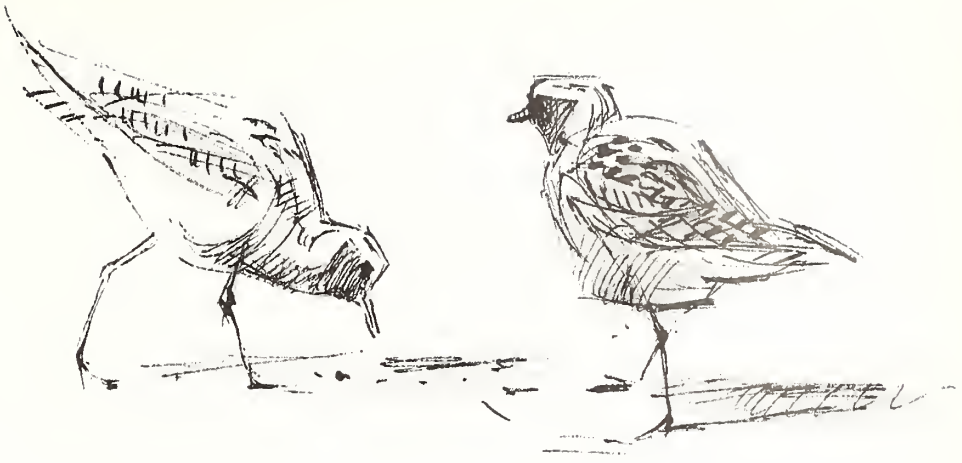
One bird which didn't sing but couldn't have been more obvious was a Little Egret, standing at the edge of a dune slack one morning. At that time this species was still a rarity but I nearly passed it by as it hid amongst prospecting male Eiders. Another unmistakable bird I confused with an Eider drake was a Blackcock which flew inland off the saltmarsh early one morning. How could such a duffer be entrusted to warden a reserve?! In my defence, Eiders, including immature males, frequently fly inland to prospect nest-sites and, like Black Grouse, they have similar wing-loading and flight action. Blackcock are, to say the least, unexpected on saltmarshes, it was early in the morning and I corrected my misidentification before I met a soul.

An identification I got right first time was when I found two tame and very fat farmyard geese approaching me for food

in the car park. You can imagine the duty constable's thoughts when I 'phoned up: "This is the Aberlady Bay warden reporting two lost geese"!

Winter geese are one of the highlights at Aberlady and I never failed to be excited by the massed ranks flighting in at dusk. Over 10,000 Pink-footed Geese flying noisily over my house regularly drew me from the tea-table just to marvel at the spectacle. This is perhaps the aspect of Aberlady I miss most now that I live inland and away from mass goose haunts.

The Marl Loch will be familiar to many SOC members as it is one of the best-known Scottish sites for Lesser Whitethroats. In late summer you may have seen volunteers, stripped to the waist and up to mid-thigh in oozy mud. They weren't looking for Paddyfield Warblers but were labouring under a hot sun to prevent vegetation choking up the Loch completely. The reward was often a pitifully small area cleared, and sometimes high water levels prevented any work taking place at all. In the early '90s, however, a floating digger was engaged and in a few days achieved what teams of coolies wouldn't have managed in weeks!



Grey Plover, one of the bay's most attractive waders. (John Busby)

Although Aberlady Bay has long been famous for its waders, which occur in good variety and, sometimes, big numbers, it has to be said that it is not an easy site to watch and you must time your visit to suit the tide. Regular scrutiny of flocks has, naturally, turned up the occasional rarity but an abiding memory is of two Broad-billed Sandpipers which arrived together in the spring of 1983. A

The scrape created to attract migrant waders. Its first customer was a Goldeneye! (Pete Gordon)

There's more to reserve wardening than watching birds.

In the 1980s, discussions about the desirability of creating a "Wader Scrape" at Aberlady sometimes became acrimonious with birders arguing strongly for such active management but other voices resisting such interference with nature. Eventually it was agreed that a scrape should be made in an area of species-poor grassland, so the vegetation was surveyed, water levels measured and plans drawn up. A digger carried out the work in a few days and the first visitor, a Goldeneye, was noted even before the work was over. Although quite a list of birds has now been recorded here, the Scrape has not been as successful as hoped in attracting waders, partly because there is no control over water levels and partly because it is too small and hemmed in by taller vegetation.

week earlier I had travelled to Stranraer to twitch one, so identification was no problem when I found the Aberlady pair feeding at the saltmarsh edge. I erected temporary signage to direct visitors, put out the news and a trickle of visitors enjoyed this splendid rarity. Then the male display-flighted and the female started disappearing into taller marsh, as if visiting a nest. The habitat was hardly like a Scandinavian quaking-bog, although it was unusually wet. So was this the first British breeding attempt? Nothing was ever proven, although two individuals returned the following spring.

I still visit Aberlady Bay from time to time and it has lost none of its magic. I miss the day-by-day familiarity I once had with the site, but perhaps my detachment now gives extra emphasis to my judgement that this place is, indeed, special. Go before the sun rises on the geese on a November morning; visit on a March day when the northeasterlies bring tears to your eyes but the seaduck bob on the waves; even visit on a broiling afternoon in August when the car park's full – that's when some of the rarest birds have been found and you can still have the saltmarsh to yourself although the beach may be crowded.

Pete Gordon

We hope to bring members right up to date with Aberlady birding in a future article in SBN. *We would also like to hear from anyone who has a favourite birding spot in Scotland, be it a mountain range, back garden, island or suburban pond, and can describe its special qualities and highlights.*

Black-and-white engraving of John James Audubon after a painting by John Syme. (John Chalmers)

Audubon in Edinburgh

What connects Haiti, Edinburgh and a turkey? As a recent exhibition and a new book demonstrate, John James Audubon, a figure inextricably linked with American ornithology and bird art, spent a surprising amount of time in Scotland's capital.

Can you imagine what it would be like to go birding in some far-flung corner of the globe without the aid of a field-guide before, during and after the trip? Exciting and interesting certainly; but also extremely frustrating, with countless exotic species flitting past and no real way of identifying them! Perhaps the only way to overcome the problem is to rely on your own memory and sketches, and an appointment at the nearest natural-history museum on your return. If we reflect on how important illustrated guides are to our enjoyment and understanding of birdwatching today, we can appreciate just how important the work of early ornithological artists was.

John James Audubon (1785-1851) is a name that many people, even those outside the world of ornithology, recognise. Audubon was a Haitian-born, French ornithologist whose adopted homeland of North America provided him with the subject matter for his paintings. In the 1820s and '30s, Audubon succeeded in seeing his work published as the *Birds of America*, a four-volume set of 435 prints engraved after his paintings, along with a companion text, the five-volume *Ornithological Biography*. The original sets of *Birds of America* are now widely regarded as the most valuable printed books in the world.

Why, then, should a man with such an exotic background end up spending nearly two-and-a-half years in Edinburgh? The answer was simply that, despite the weather, he took rather a liking to the place, and it certainly took a liking to him.

Having little success getting his paintings engraved in America, Audubon was advised to go to London or Paris to seek the necessary skills. On his way to London, he stopped off for a sightseeing visit in Edinburgh and ended up going no further. He had accidentally stumbled across people who could help him realise his goal. Audubon had arrived in Edinburgh in October 1826, slap bang in the middle of the Enlightenment, when the city was a bustling hub of intellectual activity and progressive ideas. During his six visits to Scotland's capital, he was to meet many of the most talented of the city's inhabitants, including Sir Walter Scott, William MacGillivray (sometimes known as "Scotland's Audubon"), and even the controversial anatomist Dr Knox (of Burke and Hare fame).

Most importantly, perhaps, on his first visit Audubon was introduced to William Home Lizars, an eminently qualified painter and engraver, who immediately expressed an interest in working on the plates for *Birds of America*. Indeed, Audubon records in a letter to his wife, Lucy, that Lizars' reaction to seeing the first of Audubon's paintings was: "My God, I never saw anything like this before!" And this from a man who had engraved the work of some of the best-known artists of the time.

Lizars' enthusiastic reception gave Audubon the conviction that his goal was an achievable one and that his work would be well received. This persuaded him to stay in Edinburgh and, although he did not carry out the entire mammoth task in the city, it was here that he attained the confidence (and contacts) to proceed.

Within a month of Audubon's arrival, over 200 of his paintings were exhibited and he had been made a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Scotland (now the RSA). In short, people were enthusiastic about his work and, as enthusiasm tends to breed enthusiasm, Audubon set to work with renewed energy getting the *Birds of America* off the ground.

In addition to the engraving work of Lizars, Audubon needed someone to act as a scientific advisor to the accompanying text of *Ornithological Biography*. William MacGillivray, conservator of the museum at the Surgeons' Hall, was suggested, and they soon developed a working relationship that was to last eight years.

If you were lucky enough to visit the exhibition "Audubon in Edinburgh", at the Surgeons' Hall Museum in August

and September, you will have seen an indication of how closely the two worked. On one of the very informative text panels, the audience was treated to reproductions of paintings done by Audubon and MacGillivray – both of the Great Auk. They clearly worked from the same specimen and, while both are technically flawless in their execution, there is something about Audubon's painting which brings the bird to life in a way that gives a glimpse of how huge an impact his artwork must have made on the scientific and non-scientific world at the time.

The exhibition contained several gems, including Audubon's painting "Wild Turkey Cock, Hen and Young", given by him in 1826 to the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Scotland. This excellent image was rediscovered only recently, has been restored and will go on display at the newly refurbished RSA this winter.

There were also several copies of *Birds of America* plates (on loan from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow) on display. Also featured in the exhibition were two original plates engraved by Lizars (on loan from the National Museums of Scotland), along with some of the specimens which artists such as MacGillivray may have used for their paintings!

In addition to all the delightful artwork, the more colourful side of Edinburgh in the early 19th century was brought to life with caricatures, correspondence and models depicting the work of some of the characters Audubon encountered while he was here. He seems to have taken an active part in the city life at the time, both academic and social, and even brought his family over during his fourth stay here. On his final visit he embarked on a mini tour of other parts of Scotland, taking in Glasgow, Stirling and the Trossachs. One of the more bizarre artefacts on show was a face mask of Audubon made in Edinburgh in 1827 and part of the Phrenology Museum Collection.

The exhibition was put together by the Surgeons' Hall Museum to coincide with the publication of a new book by John Chalmers entitled *Audubon in Edinburgh*. This contains some lovely reproductions of the artwork produced by Audubon and his contemporaries, and both the exhibition and the book are full of fascinating glimpses of Edinburgh in the early part of the 19th Century. Hopefully this resurgence of interest in Audubon's connections with Scotland will continue and can only help to foster links between ornithologists, naturalists and art-lovers worldwide.

Many thanks to Dawn Kemp of the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh for her information and help. John Chalmers' book *Audubon in Edinburgh* was published in July 2003 by National Museums of Scotland Publishing and will be reviewed in a future issue of *SBN*.

Caroline Scott

Audubon's recently discovered painting Turkey Cock, Hen and Young. *(Royal Scottish Academy)*

All the fun of the fair!

With the demise of the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair, many SOC members might be searching for an alternative event to check the birding market place. You need look no further than the annual British Birdwatching Fair.

This year's fair took place on 15th-17th August at its traditional venue of Egleton Nature Reserve, Rutland Water. The glorious sunshine was a bonus, but we reckon that even in a downpour it would have been enjoyable. There was a great atmosphere and a buzz of enthusiasm, interest and friendly rivalry in and around the spacious marquees as, like displaying bower-birds, the various exhibitors tried to attract as many customers as they could to their stands.

The Society of Wildlife Artists' stand.

Everything that the birder, from beginner to hard-core twitcher, could possibly want was here - optical equipment in abundance, birdfood by the bucketload, travel outfits by the dozen, and yards and yards of shelves groaning under the weight of books.

There was a healthy representation from Scotland, with tour companies such as Birdwatching Breaks, Heatherlea, Island Holidays, and Speyside Wildlife. Aigas Field Centre, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Shetland Islands Tourism, and Dragonflies! (Perthshire) were also on show. Scottish-based bird artists were very prominent, including Darren Rees, Derek Robertson, Chris Rose, John Threlfall, and Howard Towll. Indeed, one of the most impressive features, we thought, was the art marquee. Rarely could you have found such a concentration of the best bird artists, and some of their work was sensational. We were amazed to see stunning original field-guide plates (of, for example, east African sunbirds, Asian warblers, or southern hemisphere storm-petrels), being offered for two or three hundred pounds, together with magnificent full-blown portraits of birds in land- or seascapes.

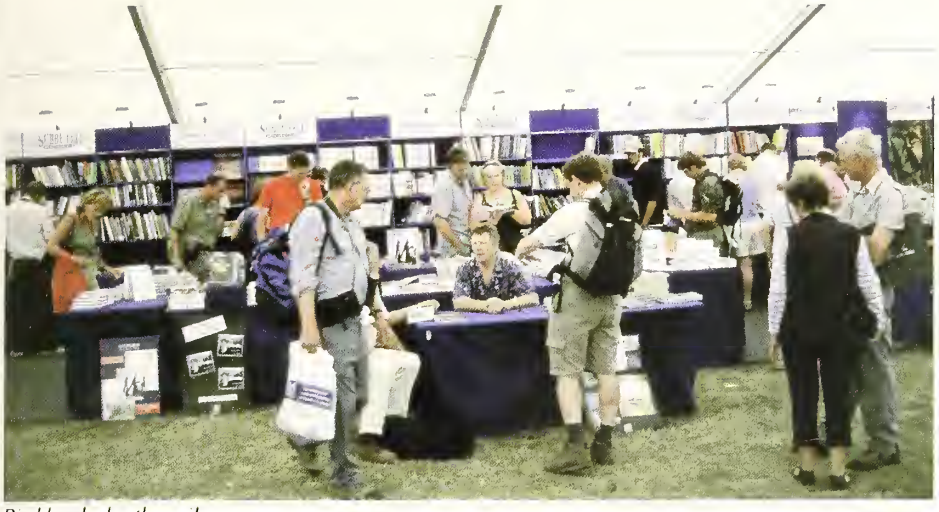
All the birding destinations you could imagine (and some you couldn't) seemed to be covered by tour operators from all over the world. So if you have an overwhelming urge to see Montezuma's Quail, Giant Sunbird, Inaccessible Rail or Carbonated Sierra-finch (if you saw two, would they be Bicarbonated?), or just want to enjoy some laid-back birding in a new locality, at home or abroad, then Rutland is just the place to pick brains and get the best deals. Any other information you might need could be gleaned from the vast selection of bird, wildlife and ecotravel books on sale. It would have been easy to spend an entire weekend just picking through the spacious shelves of Subbuteo alone, and there were plenty of others selling new and secondhand volumes to suit every taste and pocket.

Darren Rees hard at work (above). Derek Robertson on guard at his art stand (below).

Among the latest hi-tech gadgetry, we gave the new Swarovski birding website (www.swarovskibirding.com) a test drive and were very impressed. It will be interesting to see how it fares in this cut-throat and increasingly competitive field.

The Fair's numerous events included panel games (such as *Just a Linnet, Call my Ruff* and *Bird Brain of Britain*), live music, and the notorious Oriental Bird Club five-a-side football tournament. A multitude of talks included ones on the birds and marine life of the Maldives, birding the Great Silk Route, hummingbirds of Ecuador, and Spitsbergen - land of Polar Bears and Ivory Gulls. We went to a lecture by Callan Cohen of Birding Africa and enjoyed what was possibly the first ever public showing of a video of the incredibly rare and secretive Mount Kupe Bush Shrike. This and the similarly elusive Red-headed Picathartes are among the species which the company has successfully shown its clients in recent years.

All in all, this was a great event and one which we would strongly recommend to all birders. (Maybe the SOC could organise a bus or two next year?). Apart from anything else, it was a good place to mingle with fellow birders, of old acquaintance and new. The opinion of many of the exhibitors that we talked to was that it was far and away the best event of its kind in the world - no mean praise,



Bird books by the mile.

and a credit to the RSPB's Martin Davies (whose original idea it was), his fellow organisers and all the participants.

Some people do feel that the entrance fee is a bit steep. (A day ticket is £9, a two-day ticket £16, and children under 16 get in free). But surely there can't be many places where, at any price, you could be so well entertained and educated and shamelessly indulge yourself in all things birdy from nine to five? More importantly, every penny of the ticket money goes towards conservation. In its 15 years, the Fair has raised over a million pounds for conservation projects, ranging from Spanish steppes and Sumatran rainforests to the Danube Delta and the world's seabirds. This year's beneficiary is BirdLife International's "Madagascar Wetlands Conservation Programme". Two-thirds of the island's most endangered birds are wetland species and, supported by money from the Fair, the programme will involve promoting the sustainable management and wise use of wetland sites to benefit local people and wildlife.

There are also those who believe that the Fair is, at best, birding hype, and, at worst, unacceptable and crass commercialisation of their hobby. You certainly can't escape the fact that the majority of exhibitors are, indeed, engaged in a no-holds-barred operation to extract money from you but, like it or not (and as is so often the case nowadays), it's a question of "If it pays, it stays". If birds can "pay" for themselves and have their profiles raised, be it through tourism, artwork or birding hardware then, hopefully, their future will be that bit more secure.

By the end of the day we were pretty whacked, and all we had been doing was wandering around (not quite aimlessly), sustained by the occasional ice cream. So we can't imagine how the exhibitors felt after three days of hard-sell and putting up with awkward interrogation by people like us. A retrospective look through the Bird Fair Programme on the way home showed just how much we'd dipped-out on. There were dozens of exhibits which, in one day, we just didn't have time to look at or had somehow missed. We never saw the bird-ringing demonstration, hardly looked at or through any optical equipment and, despite it being the biggest artificial waterbody in Europe, we didn't even manage to clap eyes on Rutland Water or any of its birds (including the Great White Egret which had recently dropped in)! Maybe we should give it the whole weekend next time?

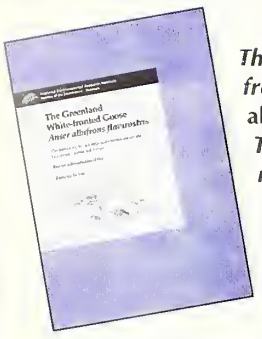
Standing on the platform at Oakham station waiting for our homeward train on the Monday morning, we were collared by a very friendly and knowledgeable representative of "PromPeru", the Peruvian Tourist Authority. Although the Fair was over, he was so committed to his job that he was dishing out brochures and posters to unsuspecting travellers and letting them know just how many bird species they could see in his spectacular and diverse country. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, and we were certainly impressed with his enthusiasm. Perhaps we'll skip Rutland next year and go to the Andes instead...?

Mike and Liz Fraser

See www.birdfair.org.uk for further information. Anyone thinking about going to next year's Fair and staying locally should book well in advance (www.rutnet.co.uk is a good starting point when looking for accommodation).

Migrants from the north - Frank and Ruaraidh Hamilton.

REVIEWS



The Greenland White-fronted Goose* Anser albifrons flavirostris. *The annual cycle of a migratory herbivore on the European continental fringe by Anthony D Fox. 2003. DSc dissertation, Ministry of the Environment, Strandgade 29, Copenhagen. ISBN 87-7772-719-3. 200 Danish kroner.

Doctoral theses are not usually reviewed in *SBN*, but one dealing with a goose of which two-thirds of the world population winters in Scotland has to be an exception. This substantial volume sets out the present state of knowledge of the goose, a considerable proportion of which is the result of the efforts of the author. While the thesis itself occupies about 100 pages, reprints of no less than 27 published papers, all co-authored by him, occupy a further 325.

The thesis lucidly discusses the life cycle of the Greenland Whitefront, looking in particular at how the birds cope with the energetic costs of migration, reproduction and moult. The results of studies in Britain and Ireland, Iceland where the birds stage in both spring and autumn, and on the breeding grounds in West Greenland are examined in the context of a population which, while about double the size it was twenty years ago, is manifestly under considerable pressure brought about both by the birds' own conservative habits (which limit its distribution), and by man's activities, particularly in Iceland and during the winter. To satisfactorily resolve the conservation issues facing this goose population requires detailed knowledge of its requirements throughout the year, which is exactly what Tony has provided in this thesis and in his publications. He deserves to be congratulated, not least on being awarded his doctorate.

Malcolm Ogilvie

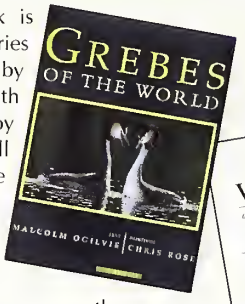
Days with the Golden Eagle by Seton Gordon. 2003 reprint. Whittles Publishing Ltd, Caithness. 174 pp, 23 b&w photographs, 23 chapter drawings. Sbk. ISBN 1-870325-35-4. £16.95.

This is a reprint of one of the most sought-after Seton Gordon titles. First published in 1927, this is a classic and very interesting account of the daily life of the Golden Eagle as seen through the eyes of a brilliant field naturalist, writer and skilled photographer. A foreword by Roy Dennis and an introduction by Jim Crumley describe the importance of this book as an early account of this majestic bird. Seton's fine photographs have all been faithfully reproduced but have lost a little definition and tone compared with the first edition. The three J C Harrison plates originally in colour are now in monochrome.

For those who cannot afford, or even find, a copy of the original, this nicely produced reprint should find a place on your bookshelf.

David Clugston

Grebes of the World by Malcolm Ogilvie and Chris Rose 2003. Bruce Coleman. 112 pp. ISBN 1-872842-03-8. £49.95.



This large format book is constructed round a series of magnificent paintings by Chris Rose, with accompanying text by Malcolm Ogilvie. All species of grebe are covered, including those recently extinct. The text is narrative rather than descriptive, but is nonetheless informative, *eg* the description of the huge (*ca* 1.5m) post-breeding flocks of Black-necked Grebes which congregate on Lake Mono in the Sierra Nevada, and the physiological changes which then occur in this flock, but not, as far as is known, in any other Black-necked Grebes anywhere in the world. It also relates the discovery of a new species (Hooded Grebe) in Argentina less than 30 years ago. The text comments as appropriate on conservation concerns. There are also distribution maps; regrettably (as with the Alaotra and Atitlán Grebes) these show where birds believed to be extinct were last seen.

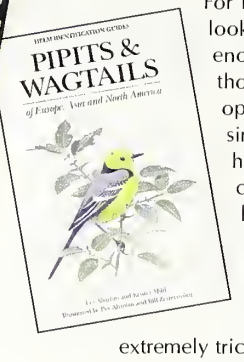
For each species there is a brilliantly atmospheric full-page painting showing the birds in context. Sometimes these are of a single bird, sometimes a pair, perhaps in courtship display, sometimes there are also chicks cadging a ride. For example, the Silvery Grebe is shown on her nest while her mate adds another piece of vegetation, and a third bird constructs another nest next door. Then the next described bird is the Junín Flightless Grebe which, the text informs us, indulges in communal fishing; thus the painting shows a group of four swimming together. Sometimes, when the amount of text allows, there is a bonus drawing in the bottom half of a page. We have come to expect excellence from Chris Rose, and he has excelled himself this time, particularly as many birds have perforce been painted from skins. If I have any criticism, it would be that there are no illustrations of birds flying.

The last part of the book contains a series of appendices. These cover measurements, breeding details and conservation status, with an interesting section on derivation of the names, both English and Latin. There is also a short section illustrating winter plumages.

This is not a book to take out into the field for identification purposes. However it is easy to read, good to look at, and gives a lot of information about a specialised family with comparatively limited representation in Europe. It would be useful to consult, for example, if you are planning a trip to South America. More grebe species are to be found there than anywhere else: the Andean lakes hold several endemic, often flightless, species, many of which are under threat. If you do not think you are particularly interested in the family, this informative and well produced book might well change your mind.

John Davies

Pipits and Wagtails of Europe, Asia and North America by Per Alstrom and Krister Mild. 2003. Christopher Helm, London. 496 pp, 30 colour plates by Per Alstrom and Bill Zetterstrom, photographic section. Hbk. ISBN 0-7136-5834-7. £48.



For many, the thought of even looking at pipits is hard enough. Indeed, there are those who may be of the opinion that wagtails are simply pipits that someone has taken the trouble to colour in. Fear not. Even the little poem at the start of this book will be of some reassurance that a sense of humour might just be required to cope with this extremely tricky set of birds.

As we've come to expect from Helm, this is yet another very thorough identification guide, both written and illustrated beautifully. The quick source of knowledge in identification guides is the section providing the plates, and these are very well presented, of particular use being those which directly compare groups of pipits which are likely to be confusingly similar, *eg* Rock Pipit, Water Pipit, Buff-bellied Pipit etc. Equally well treated are the Yellow Wagtail and White Wagtail subspecies, with a lot of attention devoted to the latter.

The text is no less thorough, with helpful subspecies measurements and sonograms which leave the reader with a wealth of information of value for comparative purposes, *eg* the calls of Richard's and Blyth's Pipits. Plumage description is almost exhaustive (personally, I would have liked just a bit more on Rock Pipits, but there are limits!), and some fine photographs accompany the text as well as appearing in a separate section at the back of the book. Throughout the species descriptions, section range maps show the world distribution and geographical variation of subspecies, but be sure you're sitting down before you look at the winter distribution map for the White Wagtail in southwestern Asia.

In these days of splitting (and big lists!?) it's pleasing to see that the authors have avoided separating the Yellow Wagtails into anything other than subspecies. For those who really must delve into species concepts and phylogeny, there's a section in the book for you, too. I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

With so much new information on species and subspecies appearing on an almost daily basis, and much of it presented in the same exciting manner of an HMI Schools Report, it's immensely gratifying to find that here is a book which copes well with the need to present both average birder and avid researcher alike with a fund of knowledge which can be readily accessed. The

authors are to be congratulated on this fine work. If you still think pipits (and wagtails) are boring, I can't recommend strongly enough that you get a copy of this book. It could change your life!

Angus Hogg

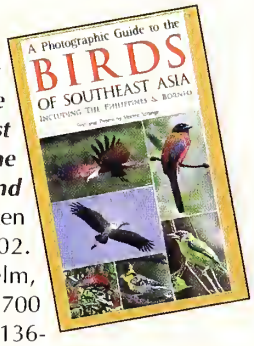
Field Guide to the Birds of Western North America and ***Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America*** by David Sibley. 2003. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-6658-9 and 0-7136-667-9. £14.99 each.

The author is deservedly well known for his single volume North American bird guide. He has followed this with these two new books containing additional illustrations and updating and expanding the texts. It is an obvious advantage to have two pocket-sized guides, both of which immediately attract with their soft plastic covers and ease of handling. The distribution maps have been revised and, considering the space available, are a good size, with each map repeated in both volumes. So which ever book you are using, you will still get the complete North American picture for all species.

The text is concise and the description of each species is completed by definitive pointers and comments alongside the excellent illustrations (the volumes combined have a total of 8,900), which are essential for certain difficult groups such as the flycatchers and warblers. There is also a very clear and detailed section on bird topography - useful when trying to describe the hoped-for rarity!

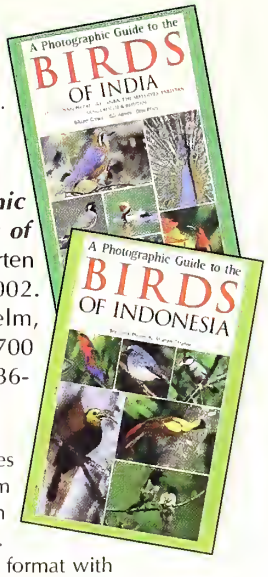
These two first-class guides are well priced and produced and will be essential for American birdwatchers and those intending to visit.

Keith Macgregor



A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia including the Philippines and Borneo by Morten Strange. 2002. Christopher Helm, London. 398 pp, 700 photos. ISBN 0-7136-6402-9. £19.99.

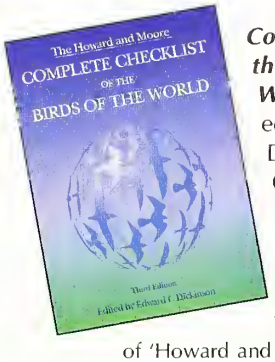
A Photographic Guide to the Birds of India, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, The Maldives, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan by Bikram Grewal, Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister. 2002. Christopher Helm, London. 512 pp, 1,050 photos. ISBN 0-7136-6403-7. £19.99.



A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Indonesia by Morten Strange. 2002. Christopher Helm, London. 416 pp, 700 photos. ISBN 0-7136-6404-5. £19.99.

All three guides measure 19 x12.5 cm and are printed on heavy quality paper. They follow a similar format with an introduction to the area, glossary, selected bibliography and index. The systematic section covers two species per page, with brief notes on key identification features, voice and habits, a colour photograph of each bird and a small distribution map. Some of the photos, particularly in the *Birds of India*, are not very clear, or are long-distance shots and would probably not assist greatly in identification. For some species there are two smaller photos to illustrate male and female or adult and immature, or bird in flight. The identification notes are clear and useful, as are the distribution maps. The guides are stated to be comprehensive and the photos do, on the whole, show the most important features of each species.

Joan Wilcox

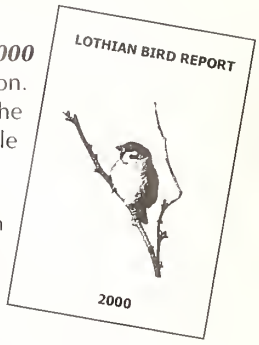


Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World (3rd edition) edited by Edward C Dickinson. 2003. Christopher Helm. 1,040 pp. ISBN 0-7136-6536-X. £60.

This is a new version of 'Howard and Moore'. As such, it is not susceptible to review: it lists birds by species and sub species and says where they are to be found. The introduction discusses the various species concepts, coming down in favour of the Biological Species Concept, though holding the position open for the future. It also has sections on the policy followed on scientific and English names. For the latter it follows *HBW* as published so far, grumbles about the transference of names (eg Robin) to unrelated species (conceding it is far too late to do anything about it), and about the use of hyphens. I am pleased to see, in the context of names, that the preferred English name for *Prunella modularis* is given as Dunnock.

One major change compared to earlier editions is in the ordering of species. For example, gamebirds come very near the start of the list, followed by swans etc, before you get to penguins, divers etc; tits are grouped with swallows and martins and well separated from treecreepers and nuthatches. This will doubtless lead to much confusion. The ordering is credited to Joel Cracraft, who has contributed a chapter explaining his reasoning. There is a lengthy bibliography.

John Davies



Lothian Bird Report 2000 Edited by Ian Thomson. Lothian Branch of the SOC. 110 pp. Available from SOC HQ. £7.00

Anybody involved in compiling an annual bird report such as this, especially in a well-watched area like the Lothians, is to be congratulated. Although this report is, unfortunately, somewhat overdue, it admirably conveys the diversity of species occurring and provides detailed information on most of them with, where appropriate, site and number comparisons so that peak counts and trends can easily be accessed. The report lacks illustrations, but it is hoped this will be rectified in future.

On the plus side, it is of interest to know that Ravens are spreading back to the area with, of course, Buzzards in quantity nearly everywhere. Sadly, Corn Bunting and Wood Warbler seem to be on the way out or already gone. There could be some doubt about using the words "common summer visitor" when applied to species such as Whinchat and Cuckoo, both of which seem to be much less in evidence than in past years. A site record count of 2,300 Sandwich Terns at Aberlady Bay begs the question - where did they come from?

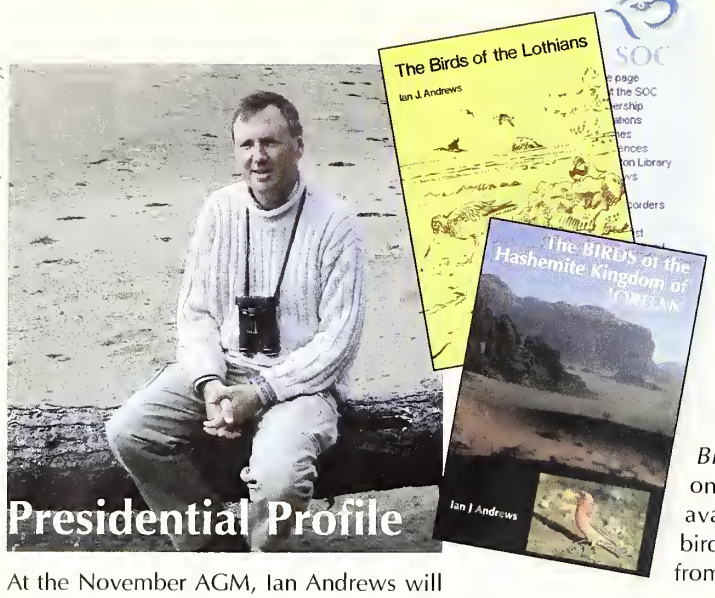
There is a useful review of the year section providing a quick guide to notable events and breeding records. Finally, this comprehensive report is rounded off by Ian Andrews' article on the Edinburgh Swift Survey, a useful initial effort to establish the species numbers in the City and its nest-site preferences.

Keith Macgregor

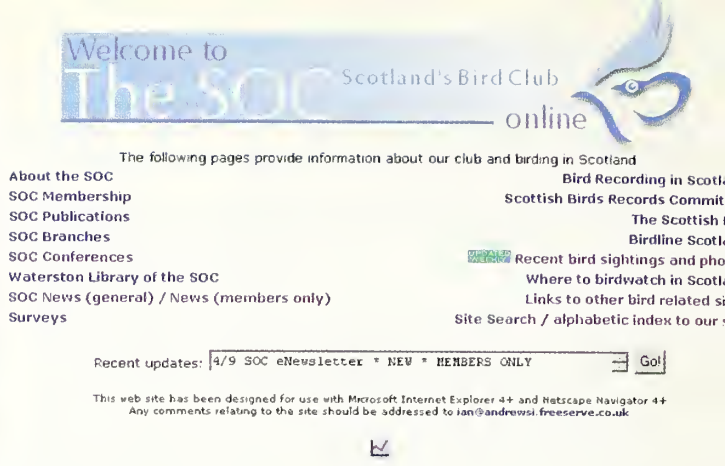
Orkney Bird Report 2001 edited by Jim Williams. Orkney Bird Report Committee. 96pp, line drawings, photographs inside cover. Available from the editor, Fairholm, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EQ. £6.00.

This is a standard format bird report. The "old" names are used with the new names in brackets. There are sections on BBRC/SBRC decisions affecting Orkney, ringing recoveries and the weather, a report from the North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory and the Siberian Blue Robin seen there, and a short chapter on the Peregrine Falcon in Orkney. Finally, there is a helpful visitor's guide to Orkney birds.

John Davies



(Tim Loseby)


Welcome to
The SOC
Scotland's Bird Club
online
The following pages provide information about our club and birding in Scotland
About the SOC
SOC Membership
SOC Publications
SOC Branches
SOC Conferences
Waterston Library of the SOC
SOC News (general) / News (members only)
Surveys
Bird Recording in Scotl
Scottish Birds Records Commit
The Scottish
Birdline Scotl
Recent bird sightings and pho
Where to birdwatch in Scotl
Links to other bird related si
Site Search / alphabetic index to our
Recent updates:
4/9 SOC eNewsletter * NEW * MEMBERS ONLY
Go!
This web site has been designed for use with Microsoft Internet Explorer 4+ and Netscape Navigator 4+
Any comments relating to the site should be addressed to ian@andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk

Presidential Profile

At the November AGM, Ian Andrews will stand down as Club president. It seems at least appropriate, if not particularly well-timed (but hopefully a valediction is better than nothing), to provide those members who do not know him with a profile of the person who has steered the Club through one of the most important and challenging times in its history.

Ian started his SOC career in 1985 as recorder for West and Midlothian. He then graduated to editor of the *Lothian Bird Report* and recorder for the Lothians as a whole. He was assistant editor of *SBN* for a few years under Stan da Prato. His appointment to Council was followed by his election to the vice presidency in 2000.

Of course, not all members, or even office bearers, are or need to be outstanding birders, but Ian certainly has this qualification. It is his passion for birds and their conservation that has been the driving force behind his involvement with the Club.

He can remember birding seriously for the first time at the age of 11. Like most of us of similar vintage, Ian initially relied on the *Observer's Book of Birds* as the source of all written birdy knowledge and wisdom. And it was simple, not to say cheap, to keep up with the output of bird books thereafter. (At least for a while. Nowadays a second mortgage is required even to hope to keep apace with the multitudinous field guides, monographs and regional accounts). His interest was further kindled by a retired school teacher who instilled in his protégé the importance of bird calls and song to successful identification. The teacher also passed on his copies of *British Birds* (at the time, the only serious magazine available to serious birders) which Ian read from cover to cover.

Mediterranean Gull, Musselburgh. (Ian Andrews)

Even at this early age, Ian was birding at least one day every weekend, a schedule which he attempts to maintain, although this is increasingly at the mercy of those commitments which come from being a family man. (Ian is married to Jill, who is also a keen birder and works part-time in the SOC office, and they have a son, Steven).

Ian did not, as might have been expected for one so enthusiastic, extend his birding interest into his career, preferring to keep hobby and work separate. A decision to study geology was a relatively easy one, although there was a severe geographical constraint on his choice of university. It was, he resolved, essential to be somewhere on the east coast so that migrants would not be far away. His first degree was, therefore, taken at Hull (handy for Spurn, Filey and other hotspots), followed by an MSc in petroleum exploration at Aberdeen. After graduating, he was appointed to the staff of the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh and has been there ever since, studying the geology of UK's underlying offshore areas.

A change from Edinburgh (and a fairly radical one, at that), was a three-year posting in 1989-92 to Jordan. Here Ian was able to enjoy some fabulous Rift Valley, desert, and oasis birding (during which, amongst other things, he rediscovered, after a gap of more than 90 years, the Blue Tit at its south easternmost breeding locality), in a greatly under-watched region. His activities and accumulated knowledge culminated in the publication of *The Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* in 1995.

This was not Ian's first venture into print, however. In 1986, the Edinburgh branch of the SOC published *The Birds of the Lothians*, his detailed account which remains the standard reference on the subject. This area continues to be his favourite birding territory and he doesn't feel the need to rush around all over the country in search of rarities, preferring to find his own birds on his own patch. He particularly enjoys birding at the mouth of the Esk, the Musselburgh scrapes, and along the East Lothian coast from Tyninghame to Thorntonloch. No one can say that birding here will always produce the goods, and many a weekend can pass, even during peak migration, when this coastline is as dead as the proverbial Dodo. Nevertheless, Ian's efforts have paid outstanding dividends over the years. Not only has he an unparalleled knowledge of the bird populations of the area, but he has struck gold with the discovery of the likes of Royal Tern and Sharp-tailed and Western Sandpipers - classy vagrants by any account.

His presidency apart, Ian's most important contribution, among many, to the Club has been its website. Ian is concerned that the Club must move not just with the times, but ahead of them, and to survive it must make full use of all the modern technology and innovations at its disposal to make more people aware of its existence, role and activities. The creation of the site was an enormous undertaking, involving hundreds of hours of work, all of it voluntary. Time and effort are also required for update and maintenance to keep it relevant and informative. The effort that Ian has expended on website has made it one of the best club sites anywhere. It has contributed hugely to forging links between the SOC and other bird clubs in Scotland and elsewhere, and strengthening birding and conservation nationally. Ian is also very keen to develop a web-based recording system for Scotland, having seen such a system work very successfully in Sweden.

Passing on the presidential reins does not mean that Ian is loosening his ties with the Club. Quite the opposite, in fact. He is looking forward to immersing himself in the production of *Birds of Scotland 3*, a major team project which requires high levels of organisation and input and for which Ian is, therefore, eminently suited. I'm sure members would wish to thank Ian for all his contributions to the Club, past and present, and wish him well for the future.

Mike Fraser

NOTES & COMMENT

Swifts evicting House Martins?

This summer a pair of House Martins nested for the first time in the gable apex of a bungalow in Lenzie, North Lanarkshire. Several other pairs were nesting nearby, including one next door. Swifts were also breeding in the neighbourhood.

On 3rd July the eggs hatched. On the 12th, however, a great avian commotion was heard from the site at 04h00. At 08h00 three nestlings were found dead directly beneath the nest and a fourth appeared a few yards down the path three hours later. The corpses were quite unmarked. The nest-hole was slightly enlarged but there was no indication of what had removed the chicks.

On 15th July the House Martins were still visiting and one of the adults was repairing the mud edge of the nest. Later, I was conscious of parties of Swifts screaming round the area. To my amazement, one of them swooped up and clung to the House Martin nest hole for a few seconds. The next day, there was some interaction between the two species as the Swifts appeared to be "heading off" the martins from their nest site. On the 17th the normal chick-feeding sounds were heard until about 08h30, but the nest was later destroyed and its remains littered beneath the site. Unfortunately, the actual destruction was not witnessed but, later on, it was noticed that the nest next door had also been destroyed. The following day there was no further Swift action but the martins had started to rebuild from scratch.

BWP reports that Swifts often evict House Sparrow eggs and nestlings and destroy the nests in the business of site-competition. Starlings are also attacked, but with less success. No mention is made of such interaction with House Martins. House Sparrows also contest sites and bully House Martins but, interestingly, although there was a brood of the former in a cavity only 15'-20' away, no interaction was seen.

As Swifts apparently take a few years to mature it is possible, as one authority has suggested, that non-breeding birds ("youthful hooligans"!) could be responsible for destroying the House Martin nests. It would be interesting if anyone has other ideas or, better still, unequivocal evidence of Swifts raiding House Martin nests in this way.

Jimmy Maxwell

Ring Ouzels in Perthshire

During the course of BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) work, Nick Borissow and I travel the length of Glen Turret and upper Glen Almond in central Perthshire. Since we began this work in 2000, we have made casual observations of Ring Ouzels in the two glens. In 2002, I led an SOC outing up Glen Turret, during which, in less than ideal weather, we counted eight male Ring Ouzels (six in song) and three females. In 2003, having completed our BBS squares, we found the opportunity to travel the full length of both glens to count all Ring Ouzels seen and heard in almost ideal weather conditions. The following note is a summary of these opportunistic visits, mainly to make known the estimated population of the species in the two glens.

The visits were undertaken on 30th (Glen Turret) and 31st (Glen Almond) May 2003. By the time we had come off the hills it was past midday, at a time when one would expect a lull in bird song. Nevertheless, conditions were such that, within each glen, Ring Ouzel song could be heard relatively easily over distances of up to 800m. Frequent stops allowed us to ascertain each site from which a Ring Ouzel was singing, and also to scan for other, silent, birds. At this period in the breeding cycle, birds are feeding young of the first brood, and we observed several birds carrying food.

Glen Turret is a relatively narrow glen, with a steep, rocky and scree-covered SW-facing slope, and a less craggy and grassier NE-facing slope on the far side of Loch Turret. The length of the glen above the Turret dam is 6km while the width is 1 - 1.5km from ridge to ridge. Vegetation on the rocky slope consists of a mixture of Heather and Blaeberry, with patches of muir-burn and isolated trees, creating a mosaic of habitats. On 30th May we counted seven males in song, plus a further six males (groups of two and four) showing agonistic behaviour, during which birds were posturing and manoeuvring for position among the rocks, the white gorgets showing very conspicuously. Two females were seen, one of which belonged to a pair carrying food. Only one singing bird was detected from the opposite slope. Two nests were found in 2001, both in or under Heather clumps low down the slope. One fledged four young, while the other was predated. During the 2002 visit, birds were also singing near the head of the glen, on crags that were silent during the 2003 visit.

Glen Almond is both longer and wider (13km long and 1.5 - 2km wide) than Glen Turret. The south-facing slope is rocky with scree along the eastern (lower) half, but with fewer crags along the western (upper) portion. The north-facing slope is similar. The foot of the glen itself consists of areas of improved grassland, which become less frequent further west. The vegetation on the slopes is a mosaic of Heather, Bracken and unimproved grassland. Along the upper part of the glen, we found five Ring Ouzels singing only where narrow rocky gulleys were present, there being few rocky outcrops and little or no scree. Birds were well-spaced, with a mean separation of 1km. Only one bird sang from the north-facing slope, next to a gulley within an area of sparsely planted young Scots Pine and Birch. The only female seen was one of a pair carrying food.

The lower 6km of the glen held the most birds. Here, we found 15 singing males on the south-facing slope, and three on the opposite hillside. In addition there was one bird just outside the glen in the Sma' Glen. The mean separation distance of the birds on the south-facing hillside was 400m, very approximately similar to nest separation distances found by Arthur and White (2001; *Scot Birds* 22: 50-59) in the Angus glens.

Ring Ouzel habitat in both glens is clearly most suitable on south or southwest-facing slopes. This may be due to a combination of vegetation differences, microclimate and geomorphology, although in Glen Turret there is far less rocky habitat on the northeast-facing slope. It is estimated that Glen Turret may hold up to 15 territories, and Glen Almond up to 30 territories. These are very rough estimates based on the 2002 and 2003 counts and can in no way be compared with the recent and more detailed surveys carried out by Arthur and White in Angus, and in Deeside (Rebecca 2001; *Scot Birds* 22: 9-19). Nevertheless, they do suggest a healthy population of the species in these Perthshire glens.

Song

The song of the Ring Ouzel varies considerably but, in general, most songs consist of three or four clear but simple notes. Stemple (2003; www.cs.umass.edu/~stemple/RZ/RZdialects.html) has shown that the most complex song is heard early in the day, becoming simpler with time. Groups of birds from a particular glen or area also exhibit dialects. Our observations were made in the afternoon, when simple song would be expected, and there was no detectable difference between Ring Ouzel songs in the two glens, which are only 3km apart at their closest point. Most song heard consisted of three or four monosyllabic notes *tirr-tirr-tirr*; occasionally a disyllabic *tidirr-tidirr-tidirr* was heard. Song was relatively easy to detect, and it was evident that rocks and scree allowed song to be projected out over the glen. Recordings available to us do not replicate the song with which we have become familiar, probably because many of the recordings have been made outside the UK. However, the tape supplied by the BTO to assist BBS surveyors in upland areas illustrates the song of Scottish Ring Ouzels well.

We thank the Glen Turret, Auchnafree and West Glenalmond estates for access permission.

Norman Elkins

We hope this note and Innes Sim's article on p 8 will encourage birders to try and assess Ring Ouzel populations in other areas to see just how the species is faring.

Unusual Chaffinch

The "erythritic" Chaffinch described by Frances Gatens in *SBN* 68:15 reminded me of such a bird at Ken-Dee marshes, Dumfries and Galloway. On 13th March 2003, as I watched Willow Tits at the RSPB hide, a male Chaffinch appeared that I can only describe as being "stunning" in the depth of colour in its plumage. The whole of the underparts was an intense orange-brown, which extended over the head and rump, with the normally white wing-bars of the same colour. The grey on the crown was reduced to two lines of blue-grey on either side of the crown, extending down on either side of the nape. There was a short white wing bar at the base of the primaries (possibly on the coverts). According to the hide log-book this bird had been seen previously.

Norman Elkins

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Water, life and landscape

Forth Naturalist and Historian 29th Annual "Man and the Landscape" Symposium. Sat 15th Nov 2003, Univ of Stirling.

The *FNH* symposia have been running since 1975 to promote public knowledge and interest in the environment and heritage of mid-Scotland. Talks this year include "Flowing waters of the Forth: landscapes and ecosystems", "After the great improvers - farming the carseland today", and "Conserving the wetlands - Flanders Moss". There will be a field trip (£10.00) to Flanders Moss on Sunday 16th Nov (places limited to 25 - contact Kate Sankey, 01786 467944; c.e.sankey@stir.ac.uk for details).

The price of the Symposium is £10 (all day) or £5 (half day). Students attend for half price. For booking enquiries contact M Scott (01786 467269; mbn1@stir.ac.uk). Details of the *Forth Naturalist and Historian* are at http://www.fnh.stir.ac.uk/index.htm

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GM crops and birds

British Ornithologists' Union scientific meeting 5th - 6th Feb, 2004 at the Royal Society, London.

The issues surrounding GM crops and birds have received little attention in the ornithological press and literature to date. The results of the UK GM Crop Farm-Scale Evaluations (FSEs) are likely to first be available from mid October 2003, in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*. In order to encourage dissemination and discussion of the FSEs and other relevant research, the BOU is holding this open meeting. An exciting programme is currently being drawn together and will be announced in Nov 2003. Further details will be posted on the BOU website (www.bou.org.uk) in due course, and will be available from Steve Dudley, BOU Administrator (01 733 844 820; steve.dudley@bou.org.uk).

RECENT REPORTS

Summer Review

For most Scottish twitchers the midsummer period belonged to three rarities: two terns, and a **Black Kite**. The latter was present, apparently for its second consecutive summer, from at least 15th June-8th July and again on 16th Aug, in northeast Sutherland near Kinbrace, along the same stretch of road where one, presumably the same bird, was present last summer. News "did not get out" last year but it did this year, enabling many birders to take advantage of the first ever twitchable Black Kite on mainland Scotland, and the first record for Highland to boot. Remarkably, another was seen in Highland at Glen Glass on 2nd Aug.

Scotland's rare tern record in recent years is very good, so perhaps it is not surprising that this should continue. A **Gull-billed Tern** was in the Ardvule Point area, South Uist, on 17th-31st July (third record for Outer Hebrides), whilst a **Bridled Tern** spent the evening of 19th July feeding distantly offshore at Arbroath before flying south. The first record for Angus and only the fifth record for Scotland, it was also the first reported anywhere in Britain since 1994.

The first fortnight of June can often be the best part of the spring in Scotland but, unfortunately, it wasn't really the case this year, although some rarities were around, especially in the Northern Isles. In early June, Fair Isle produced a **Lesser Grey Shrike** on 5th (20th record; first since 1993), a first-summer male **White-throated Sparrow** on 9th (third record), and **Red-breasted Flycatcher** on 7th. Elsewhere, a **Greenish Warbler** was on

White-throated Sparrow, Fair Isle, June 2003. (Deryk Shaw)

Foula on 3rd, four **Subalpine Warblers** were seen, a **Red-rumped Swallow** toured Shetland on 3rd-5th, and a **Short-toed Lark** was on North Ronaldsay on 9th. A **Melodious Warbler** ringed nearby on Sanday on 11th was re-trapped the next day on Foula where it remained until 15th. In June and July 12+ **Common Rosefinches** and 8+ **Red-backed Shrikes** were seen. Three **Icterine Warblers** were all on Shetland, as were five **Marsh Warblers** (all in June and contrasting starkly with last year's great showing). Fourteen **Turtle Doves** were reported, a male **Ortolan Bunting** was at Scatness (Shetland) on 1st June, three **Woodchat Shrikes** were seen (in Highland and Isle of May in June and Outer Hebrides in July), and five **Golden Orioles** were found in the first week of June. Three **Bluethroats** were seen during the month, including a male at Daer Reservoir on 17th June. This was remarkable enough in being the first for Lanarkshire, but it was also only the second anywhere on mainland Scotland this spring/summer.

Into midsummer proper, and two male **Black-headed Buntings** were seen; one near St John's Loch (Caithness) on 28th June to at least 1st July, and on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 2nd-6th Aug. That other Near East cracker, **Rose-coloured Starling**, failed to repeat last year's influx, with only nine seen. Two or more **Bee-eaters** were heard but not seen as they flew over Lonmay (Aberdeenshire) on 26th July. Aberdeenshire also played host to at least one **Spoonbill** over the summer, with another at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on 3rd Aug, whilst a **Little Egret** summered at Montrose Basin (Angus). The same wandering **Great White Egret** may have been responsible for sightings in June at Achnahaird (Highland) on 1st, Gladhouse Reservoir on 13th (third record for Lothian), and then Drummond Loch (Perthshire) on 21st. An adult **Night Heron** was at Howbeg, South Uist on 13th-20th June. Also in the Outer Hebrides, there

Woodchat Shrike (above), Isle of May, May 2003. (Calum Scott). Black-headed Bunting (below), Caithness, June 2003. (Alistair McNee)

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was at least one adult **White-billed Diver**, being reported from Port of Ness on 9th June.

It was an indifferent summer for **Spotted Crakes**. For the first time in many years there where no confirmed records of calling birds at Insh Marshes RSPB (Highland), although birds were seen at Baron's Haugh RSPB (Lanarkshire) on 14th July and two on Unst (Shetland) in early Aug. It was a reasonable, if unspectacular, summer for calling **Quail** with 22 reported in June and seven in July. In Aug, however, no fewer than 11 were heard calling at Pitcox (Lothian) on 7th, suggesting either under-reporting elsewhere or perhaps just a discreet fall in that area during the very hot, dry spell. **Corncrakes** on the Scottish islands continue to go from strength to strength, with numbers of calling birds up on the Inner Hebrides and Orkney. A new record for Tiree (Argyll) was set, with 184 calling males (there were 172 in 2002).

Snowy Owl, North Uist, August 2003. (Brian Orr)

A second- or third-year male **Snowy Owl** was at Grenitote, North Uist, from 7th Aug, possibly the same as reported on St Kilda in May. Another midsummer surprise was the **Scops Owl** discovered in the Plantation on Fair Isle on 30th July. Could this have been the same individual seen on Unst in May? Surprisingly, it was the first record for Fair Isle.

A second record for Fair Isle occurred in the form of the adult **Semipalmated Sandpiper** on 13th Aug. This was far and away the rarest wader reported in the period in a disappointing showing. Nine **Pectoral Sandpipers** were, however, seen in July and Aug in Aberdeenshire (two), Outer Hebrides (three), Orkney (two), Caithness, and Dumfries and Galloway. Perhaps the only other wader worth commenting on is **Little Ringed Plover**, which appears to be undergoing a distinct status change in Scotland. Record numbers of breeding birds were reported this year, reflecting the 20+ migrants reported in July and Aug.

Mediterranean Gull has also been undergoing a status change for several years now, and a first-summer seen at Sandside Bay on 7th June was the first record for Caithness. In an exciting development, from 29th July onwards six juveniles were seen, including Belgian colour-ringed individuals, in Aberdeenshire and Orkney. A **White-winged Black Tern** was at Loch of Tankerness (Orkney) on 2nd-8th June, whilst 10 **Black Terns** were seen from 19th July, including three at Tyninghame (Lothian) on 2nd Aug.

Seawatching was generally unproductive during the period, with a scattering of **Balearic Shearwaters** reported as normal, and only low numbers of **Sooty Shearwaters** seen by mid Aug. Two **Cory's Shearwaters** were reported: off Tarbat Ness (Highland) on 15th June and Fife Ness (Fife) on 10th Aug. A probable **Great Shearwater** passed Frenchman's Rocks, Islay (Argyll) on 24th July. The signs were there, however, for a good **Long-tailed Skua** autumn with 15 adults reported on 14th-20th Aug, including nine past Strathy Point (Highland) on 17th.

A drake **Ferruginous Duck** identified at Loch Gelly on 30th July remained into Aug and proved popular, being the first record for Fife and the first on mainland Scotland since 1992. A drake **Ring-necked Duck** also summered at Loch Gelly, whilst up to three (two drakes and a female) **Surf Scoters** were at Blackdog (Aberdeenshire) throughout the period under review. Three **King Eiders** were seen: the female commuting between Aberlady Bay and Leven off and on over the summer, and two drakes in the Firth of Clyde - one at Saltcoats (Ayrshire) on 14th June-2nd July, and one off the Cowal Peninsula (Argyll) to at least 21st June.

King Eider, Ayrshire, June 2003. (Brian Orr)

If autumn proper begins on 1st July then, technically, an **Arctic Warbler** on Unst (Shetland) on 2nd was the first migrant of the autumn. But as the species doesn't usually arrive at its northern Scandinavian breeding grounds until the end of June, a late spring migrant seems more appropriate! Autumn was certainly heralded by a **Barred Warbler** on Fair Isle on 8th Aug, the first of at least 10 in the Northern Isles by the 20th. Also in Aug, an **Ortolan Bunting** was on North Ronaldsay on 18th, with an **Icterine Warbler** there on 18th-20th. Three **Common Rosefinches** were seen on Shetland, and a **Red-backed Shrike** was on Foula on 12th-14th. With this build-up, that classic Aug rarity, **Greenish Warbler**, arrived on cue, with singles on North Ronaldsay and Fetlar on 20th. An adult female **Red-footed Falcon** was also found on 20th near Collieston (Aberdeenshire), and so the most exciting period for many in the birding calendar was up and running.

Red-footed Falcon, northeast Scotland, August 2003. (Harry Scott)

This report was based largely on news telephoned into Birdline Scotland. I thank the many finders of rare and scarce birds who share their sightings with other birders by doing this. Monthly summaries were also provided by John Bowler (Tiree), Deryk Shaw (Fair Isle) and Eric Meek (Orkney) - my special thanks to them.

Angus Murray (BirdLine Scotland)

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

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